A ROMANCE OF CEYLON

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LONDON

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Paternoster Square

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CHAPTER I

THE sea was breaking in crisp waves upon the coral reef that faced the white beach of Kollupitiya, and a gentle breeze stirred the glistening fronds of the elegant palms that fringed the shore, as a group of children issued from the School of Santa Maria, to be dispersed up and down the long, dusty road that skirted the sea. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, the sun was still hot, and the bullock carts, drawn by weary teams, slowly meandered along the well-used and familiar highway. A girl, rather taller than her companions, had separated from them, and was pursuing her way to a small, red-tiled house, half-hidden among bananas and hibiscus, its porch embowered in convolvulus. Her pale, fawn-coloured skin contrasted strikingly with the dark tints of the work-people in the street; the pallor of her cheeks and the dark circles round her grey eyes witnessed to habitual seclusion in the semi-darkness of her home, or in the deep shades of its leafy surroundings; her nose was straight, and slightly widened at the nostrils; her lips rather more full than those of the north countries, but elegant in outline, and

velvety in texture; her hair was drawn tightly back from the brow, and was shiny with scented unguents, fastened behind in a knot, and wreathed with a small chaplet of white flowers; her figure was slight, the swell of the bosom beneath the snow-white linen bodice showing that she was leaving childhood behind; the feet were small and without covering, revealed below a wrap of blue silk, worn tightly round her form from the waist downward; one rounded arm supported a slate, a writing-book and work-basket, the implements of her school life, and the other was raised, while she shaded with her hand her eyes from the slanting rays of the sun. As she turned out of the street into the little walk which led up to the house, her mother came out to the porch and received her at the door with an affectionate pat on the shoulder, which was responded to by the girl slipping her arm round the mother's waist.

'Kirimanica, my child, are you glad to be home?'

'Mother, to me it is better than all the world outside, and your love more than anything the world can give.'

She put down her burden and busied herself in watering some pots of favourite flowers which were disposed along the verandah, looking up from her occupation every now and then to smile at her mother.

The latter was of Kandyan race and retained the costume of the country similar to that in which the girl was dressed; of thirty years of age, she retained much of her youthful beauty, with the marked profundity of expression in the dark eyes which is not uncommon in the East. Married at

seventeen years of age, her daughter was now fourteen. Her husband, Panabokki, was a scion of an old Ceylon race, of conservative habits and feelings, whose ancestors held land at Matila in the Kandyan province, and were once of consequence at the native Court. He had so far conceded to modern exigencies as to qualify for practice as an advocate in the Supreme Court, and dressed in English costume when at his daily work. The members of his family circle were simple folk, following agriculture, as they have always done, and knowing little of English ways. Against the latter he was prejudiced, especially as regards the use of intoxicants and the freedom of habits displayed by women. This in particular made him more rigid than he would naturally be in the management of his own household. His wife kept much indoors, both by taste and in deference to his desires, and his daughter went out little save to attend school. In his opinion the knowledge of a woman should extend only to those things which will render her a good housekeeper, a faithful wife, and a careful mother, but he had yielded to the advice of friends in sending his daughter to the Catholic school of Santa Maria. There was no Buddhist seminary, save an elementary one, in his neighbourhood, and, under the Sisters of Santa Maria, the child was acquiring mental training equal to that afforded in Europe. She had passed the age at which some are withdrawn by their parents from school, but Panabokki wisely refrained from pressing the girl to think of marriage while still a child in thought—a common practice with those of his race.

The father used to mix largely with the English

and men of other nationalities in the course of his legal practice, and was not prejudiced enough to ignore the good qualities that each possessed, nor sufficiently blind to see that each had, in the large world of Colombo, his own and proper sphere of action. But in social relations, as has been hinted already, he preferred to retain the primitive exclusiveness native in an Eastern race. The mother and daughter, with their two faithful attendants, a man and his wife, stayed largely at home, their only change being an occasional visit to other Singhalese ladies, or a long and refreshing sojourn with their relations up among the hills, in the cool areca groves of Matila. Modern life, the bustle and excitement which are its pronounced features, were at their very door, and they viewed its many curious phenomena as a panorama from afar off, and so much being outwardly repugnant to their simple tastes and natural timidity, fresh incentive was afforded to remain apart, merely as wondering spectators. And yet they were not wholly ignorant of the impulses and feelings which actuated the figures that paraded upon their stage, for the girl Kirimanica would read many English books, both alone and often aloud to her mother. They had learned to admire the manly strength of character depicted in Western people, and saw its results in much that had been achieved in the Ceylon of to-day. They had learnt to know that courage and enterprise need not exist apart from generosity and kindness, for, indeed, the pictures they found painted in glowing words, both in history and romance, displayed heroes who combined attributes such as these. But in strong contrast with so much that was admirable there were

barbaric tastes and mannerisms which discounted the impressions formed, and, especially in the latitude permitted to women, there seemed to be open encouragement of impurity.

Dharmaputa, the Buddhist priest, who conducted the service at the temple, and who would often sit for a time in Panabokki's house, clothed in his yellow robe, would enlarge upon this peculiar feature in Western life, and deplore the bad example it set to Orientals, who believed that a woman should look upon no other man than her husband. He would argue that filial obedience and reverence would be withheld by the children from a mother who would spend much of her time in the society of strange men, and who could learn to find their smiles and praise and constant company necessary for her pleasure; and if that came about, would not the divine light nurtured through this sacred relationship between mother and child fade away? He had seen among his own mountains the evil taint born of lack of reverence for the marriage tie, and he was ever warning against intercourse with a people from whom such a tendency might be contracted. He would even to Panabokki deprecate the girl's attendance at a mixed school, where her simplicity and single-mindedness might be imperilled. But he could not but admit that the circumstances of life in the East had entered upon a new phase which made learning necessary both to peer and peasant. If that were so, mothers should know enough to be the teachers of their infants. Kirimanica herself, in addition to natural ability, had the curiosity engendered in one who is living upon the verge of a new and unexplored country, and who is as yet

unaware of the exact nature of the marvels it contains, and she had progressed more quickly than many of her companions who lived lives less secluded than her own. She was filled with curiosity to learn the mode in which the white people around her passed their time, by what common feeling there was union among them, and how it was that, even in their amusements, they seemed to be so earnest and in such haste. They seemed to be so free and independent, and able in so many ways to gratify their tastes, that had the girl been subjected to other than a subdued atmosphere, she might have felt some envy in this contemplation; but it had not yet come to this that she should wish to cross the threshold of her quiet home from any spirit of adventure inspired by what she had seen and heard.

So far it had been an excitement in her restful life to be taken round the native town when decorated upon the birthday of Buddha, and to witness the gorgeous pageantry at Kandy at the annual festival of the Temple of the Tooth, but perhaps greatest to run wild upon the Matila hills, when visiting the ancestral estate, to gather the brilliant wild flowers, to watch the strange denizens of wood and field and river, to breathe the scented air, to lift her gaze to skies of ever-changing tints, in short, to enjoy to the full all that to children pure nature makes so dear. That life had been up to now to the girl the ideal one, and now, at a marriageable age, she began to feel her first, even if only a faint, regret. For she became aware that a slight restraint was imposed upon her careless ways. She could not now sport in the meadows clothed only with a silk wrap round the waist,

nor bathe with the other girls and boys in the pond. Innocent of any feeling which might prompt her of herself to change such habits, she had yielded to the wishes of her parents, as she always had done without question, in implicit trust in their superior wisdom. This first symptom of seclusion, of a gradually contracting environment, had seemed to render the girl the more imaginative, and to cultivate a curiosity to know what was passing in others than her own little world. Panabokki had the wisdom to direct this into right channels, and such healthful literature as he could find was readily given to the child. Her mother could not find answers to the many questions that the books suggested, and many a time they would have to be deferred until there was leisure and opportunity to consult the father.

The social relations implied by marriage are often, it might be said, commonly, understood quite in childhood in the East, so that kindred thoughts pass by without markedly blurring the innocence it possesses.

Kirimanica had realised, before she had come to maturity, that her future, like that of other Singhalese girls, was to bear and rear children. She had been intended from her infancy to marry her cousin Rámbanda, son of Panabokki's brother at Matila. They had him brought up in this idea, and had frequently been in each other's company during childhood. No pressure was ever used to promote the attachment, which the parents on both sides hoped would be formed by mutual inclination. The girl's thoughts had not, therefore, hitherto strayed in search of a lover, nor were they even insensibly bent in speculations, as in cases where

ignorance of such things prevails, upon the significance of the marital bond, and the sense in which it was to be accepted. Her ideas really went outside the little world in which she lived to the large cities of the West with their teeming, busy multitudes, which sent forth the mighty steamers that day by day glided in and out of Colombo harbour, landing costly freights and scores of passengers of alien races, and bearing away cargoes of tea, and oil and spices; to frame mental pictures of the gorgeous displays in which kings and queens took part, to realise, if in imagination only, the beauties of the art galleries, and the charms of music and song, of which she could but know by mere reading in print in her home thousands of miles away. Her habits of thought had predisposed her to be interested in what was foreign to her own country, and, daily from her studies, and from the perusal of some new book, she received some fresh stimulus to her curiosity. If her inquiries became too embarrassing, and she was told to be silent, she accepted the situation out of deference to her parents, and tacitly deferred the solution of her problem to some future time, when new light might be afforded.

It was in the evening after sundown that the family would be assembled in the little room that overlooked the garden. A lamp, with cut-glass pendants, hung from the ceiling; a sofa, a few easy-chairs and table, standing upon coloured grass matting, a bookshelf and a piano composed the furniture, the whole a commonplace imitation of modern style. A handsome carved satinwood screen divided the sitting from the dining-room behind, the latter furnished with but a table,

chairs and sideboard. In the bedrooms the couches and utensils were of Singhalese pattern. The interior was like that of many other houses of to-day—a compromise between the fashion of Ceylon of the past and Europe of the present. But the love of native grace and art was witnessed in the elegant painted scroll-work upon the walls, the garlands of leaves festooned above the doors, and the bouquets of lily and hibiscus upon the tables. Here they would sit on most evenings, mother and daughter, in spotless linen bodices, low in the neck, and edged with curious lace, clothed below the waist with soft and bright silk wrappers, wearing in their ears pearl drops, and handsome gold ornaments upon necks and arms. The mother would generally sew while Kirimanica read, sometimes aloud, when her father, having finished the newspaper, would give his attention to her. His eyes at such times would rest fondly upon the lovely face and figure of the child, and he would wonder within himself how, when the time came, he could ever bear to let her go to another home, and to lose the smiles and the caresses which now seemed necessary to brace him up for his daily work.

Sometimes, when there was moonlight, the little party would stroll through the cocoa-palm grove to the sea-shore, and along the white beach, enjoying the cool and fresh breeze that came across the ocean. The girl would gaze in wonder at the large hotel that looks down upon the surf, glittering with a hundred lights, with numbers of people visible through the windows seated at snowy tables, covered with flowers and elegant glass, and waited upon by a troop of servants in white garments. Occasionally there would be strains of

music and song, which seemed heavenly when compared with that which she was accustomed to hear at marriage feasts and religious ceremonies.

One night the Club was brilliantly illuminated, and tents pitched outside to help to accommodate the large number of people who frequented the annual race ball. A stream of carriages made a long, snake-like line of lights along the road. Later, the strains of a military band were wafted across the esplanade. Through the open windows Kirimanica could see the figures gliding in the dance. Approaching nearer, she could distinguish and admire the handsome dresses of the ladies. It was all a wonder-land; but what she could not grasp was the meaning of a ceremony which could admit of intimate contact, almost an embrace, between ladies and gentlemen, almost, it seemed to her, in an indiscriminate manner. She had at other times seen them riding, driving and conversing together, and had learnt to know that the white races were more free in their habits than the Singhalese, but the incidents of the present scene passed her comprehension. Her father, seeing her observant gaze, said,—

'It is time we were returning; let us go hence.'

'What does this mean, father?' said the girl. 'I do not remember that we have read in our books of the dance as the white people do it.'

'It is not good for us, my child. The English are different. I hear that this mode of dancing has been in vogue with them for a hundred years, and that at such assemblies as this intoxicating wines are used to excite the mind, and, it may be in some cases, to excite the passions. Virtue itself sometimes wavers in such circumstances. Let this

be. Think no more of it. Turn your eyes to the fresh and purifying beauties of nature, which we have in the ocean in front of us, in the spangled sky, in our own garden, and in the ever-changing aspects of our eternal hills.'

'Father speaks truly,' said her mother, as they regained the shade of the stately palms. 'Let not your thoughts dwell, my heart's love, upon the evils that our large city—may the Lord Buddha guide us!—presents to you. Be content with your quiet home here, and that which you will perhaps have with Rámbanda by-and-by at Matila.'

'Be it so, dear mother, I will ask no more; but about Rámbanda, let us wait. I love him as a brother, but I cannot tell yet whether I am minded to give myself to him and to bear him children. It seems to me sometimes that the feeling of love, of which we read so much, which fills one's whole being, which is said to awaken an ecstasy by the touch of him who loves one, and which binds one to sacrifice all one's treasures at his bid, that this feeling is still foreign to me. Promise, mother, that only to him for whom I have this sense I shall be wed.'

'I cannot follow you in these thoughts, my daughter; few ever go through life expecting to find the love of which you speak. Many marry only with a sense of respect for each other, and from mutual taste; and the bond becomes cordial from common interests, and from the indulgence of sexual inclinations; then with the first-born there comes a tie which binds together the father and mother with inexplicable strength. She finds then happiness of which she has never dreamed, when the babe reposes with its head upon her

breast. I trust this may be yours, Kirimanica, but do not dwell in thought upon that kind of love which is awakened only in a few.'

Then the father interposed,—

'What you speak of is the love of song, of poetry, and of romance, such as exhibits itself as passion, over-rides law, and often incites to crime. But it does not endure, daughter, and is foreign to our own lives. Your mother and I have loved each other from childhood in such way as married folk should; alive to the faults of self, and also aware of those of the other, contriving to be silent when they would become apparent; solicitous with kind offices in sickness; and filled with earnestness to dispel such clouds as might darken our atmosphere. Marital love is like a plant. It improves each day by careful culture; but it fades if it lack its accustomed ministrations. True love is like the slow and deep waters of the Kelani, which ever sweep onwards and are finally absorbed in the ocean—the ocean of eternity; but passion is soon sated, and like the foaming torrent coursing down Hunusgiriya's slope, is quenched and disappears when adversity comes, as the stream in the hot season. If you can, my Kirimanica, think of your cousin Rámbanda with affectionate regard, hesitate not to give yourself to him. He is a good lad, faithful to his duties, kind to his parents, attentive to the words of the Great Teacher, and, in prospect of wedding you, has already put by a good sum of money.'

'Father,' replied the girl, 'if I can think of Rámbanda in this way I will respect your wish, but I am not sure yet that I feel toward him as

I should towards a husband. In our childhood we have played together, and in company often have we carried flowers to the Dagola; but now it seems to me that Rámbanda's thoughts and mine are not the same. He is ever bent upon the care of cattle, the ploughing of the land, or the repair of the thorn fences. The odours of sweet flowers, the glint of the soft moonlight upon the shining palm leaves, the murmurs of the brook, the glow of colour in the evening skies—all that seems to me to make life at Matila beautiful—are to Rámbanda as nought. I fear we have grown apart. Let me, happy with you, father, and dear mother, rest awhile longer, a girl, untouched by care or disappointment.'

So they turn in to their little home, a shade of perplexity resting upon Panabokki's brow. The girl was becoming superior in mind to her old surroundings; this was the effect of the school training she was receiving, and the associations at school to which she was subjected. Would it be wise to check this development? Would she ever be reconciled to the destiny which they had hoped would be hers? Would she be wise enough to recognise the nobility of earnest work in however humble a sphere? To these mental queries he could find no immediate responses, but in her present disposition he could find no trace of discontent, and the mental training she had received seemed to have made her susceptibilities keener than before, and to have awakened habits of observation and reflection which could not now be destroyed. Things must take their way. If she were to rise to a higher plane than that in which such as those in her family circle moved, it must

be so, and it was not for him to hold her back But he sighed when he thought of the uncertainty of her future, and the growing distance of the marriage—a happy one they had hoped—upon which the family had always speculated.

CHAPTER II

ADJOINING Panabokki's garden, and separated by a fence of cactus overgrown with roses, was a park-like enclosure containing a stately house—Lotus Hall—the residence of a rich merchant of Colombo, Mr Agnew. In front was a high portico formed of Corinthian pillars, from whence was the entrance into a handsome drawing-room, decorated with gold mouldings; behind, a dining-saloon, furnished with ebony; the two wings of the house contained each a suite of several rooms, and round the whole was a spacious verandah supported upon white columns. An imposing façade thus appeared in view as the house was approached from the road, but the public gaze was intercepted by clumps of bamboos and suriya trees, which formed the boundary of the lawn, which covered several acres in front of the house. Behind were large groups of banyan trees, casting the densest shade at all times of the year; skirting the porch were banks of ferns, and twining the columns, a luxuriant growth of lycopodium. A basin of water filled the centre of the lawn, its surface covered with red lotus. A covered fernery occupied the ground at the southern extremity of the house, which was that nearest to Panabokki's; and at the north end was a mass of arum lilies and iris, also sheltered from the ardent sun. The

owner of the mansion was a man of taste and culture, as well as of strong ambition. In addition to the business which he conducted in Colombo, he had been provided with means, at a critical juncture in the coffee industry, by which he purchased a number of estates which were deemed to be worthless, but which since then had been put under other cultivation with remarkable success. These investments had, in a period of ten years, multiplied in value twenty-fold. Every day witnessed some fresh accession to his property. From his youth—he was now fifty years of age—he had lived with the ambition to become a social power—a power which wealth bestows so easily but is so difficult to acquire by other means. It was well within possibility that he might in time, in his prominent position in the commercial world, for his services in the Legislative Council, and in approbation of his liberal donations to public objects, be selected for some mark of the Queen's favour. At present, at all events, he was a man of considerable mark in Ceylon. His wealth was reverenced, and his opinions, being those of a man of considerable acumen and observation, were perhaps for this reason all the more courted and deferred to. He had always determined that everything in his surroundings should be unexceptionable. The house was therefore furnished and decorated, if not sumptuously, with artistic effect. The drawing-room was of polished white, with mouldings in gilt, and with clusters of frosted glow-lamps suspended from the roof; with a floor of marble covered here and there with Persian carpets; the white and gold chairs and couches upholstered with blue silk.

In the angles of the walls, on pedestals, stood chaste reproductions of Italian sculpture, and as the eye glanced round the room it rested upon some fine works in oils supported by easels. The dining-room walls were of terra-cotta colour, hung with engravings after Graham and Stuart; the furniture of carved ebony, and standing upon a carpet of velvet pile of dark red; opaque glass, coloured faintly pink, in the windows, admitted a subdued and enjoyable light; an electrolier of silver filigree, containing a circle of glow lamps suspended downwards, and shaded by pink silk, hung over the table, and on the sideboard, in the numerous niches of its superstructure, which rose almost to the ceiling, was a splendid show of Oriental silver. The table was, except when a large company was bidden, laid always for four, so that, in addition to Mr Agnew and his wife, casual visitors could be received. It glittered with cut glass, and was adorned with a Dresden bowl containing delicate ferns and orchids obtained with difficulty from the distant forests. The suites of rooms contained in the wings, which lay north and south, comprised each a boudoir or writing-room, a bedroom and a dressing-room, with a marble bath attached; the rooms were divided one from another by exquisite satinwood screens, the work of Singhalese carvers; the floors consisted of a parqueterie of Ceylon woods, and the furniture of polished holly, upholstered in pale green Japanese silk. The same material composed the window and the bed hangings. Some choice plants of roses in bloom, placed here and there in Majolica vases of large size, served to diffuse a voluptuous fragrance, heightened by the

odour of heliotrope, which, renewed every few days, hung outside the windows in moss-covered baskets. The master's own writing-room was lined with book-cases from floor to ceiling, and contained what he always called his best friends. Among the best-used books were those of Disraeli. In the verandah immediately at the back of this room were stands containing guns, rods, whips and rackets, and behind again a path under the banyan trees lined with rose bushes, and leading, at a distance of a few hundred yards, to the stables and coach-house, where stood some half-dozen horses, with a brougham, dog-cart and mail phaeton, and a well-equipped harness and saddle room.

In his bachelor days, George Agnew had often dreamed of the ideal wife he hoped some day to possess, as many others have done. Of cultivated taste himself, an artist in music and in painting, he had naturally wished to find a companion of similar talent, with the same keen appreciation as himself for the beauty of nature in the smallest and most contracted environment. The very love of what was beautiful, which had been so sedulously indulged, had made him difficult to please with those of his own kind. He had always looked for a girl of more than ordinary physical charms, and naturally for one who was young. The combination desired had been a difficult one to realise, and his peculiarly intellectual temper of mind had proved a further obstacle in rendering him unsympathetic with youth. Many years had passed without his having satisfied himself that he had met one with whom he could irrevocably unite himself. It seemed

as if his destiny were to pass his life alone. But once, during a visit to England, he had formed a friendship with an artist, in whose house at Hampstead he found a welcome retreat from the din and excitement of town life, and in which he felt agreeably refreshed when released from the anxieties of business pursuits, tired of the monotony of the club smoking-room, and of the heated atmosphere of theatre and social assemblies.

The garden was a picture of sylvan beauty, and many a long evening was spent in quiet converse, stimulated by the fragrant weed, under the shade of the spreading cedars upon the lawn. But the feature which had most attraction for Agnew was the lovely Helen Caselli—the only child of the house—who was then in the springtide of womanhood. The depth of feeling expressed in her violet eyes, the chaste purity of her white skin, the deep red of her delicately-cut lips, the golden sheen of her wavy hair, the clean outline of her finely-chiselled nose, the broad, thoughtful brow, and the grace of her slender, lately-ripened figure, had combined to present a charm which he was obliged to confess to himself he could not resist. She would sit, as a listener for the most part, during the long talks which turned mostly upon art, and had, from frequent association with Agnew, from dwelling upon his manly beauty, and from admiration of his great attainments, after many summer evenings, grown to reciprocate some of the regard which for her had evidently taken strong root in his nature. The girl had lost her mother in her childhood, and had gained her education in her

father's studio, from his book-shelves, and from the many master minds of science and of art with which she had come in contact in his social circle.

Religion was, from Caselli's point of view, not to be taught by dogma, but to be acquired by degrees, as the mind was trained by a process of eclecticism. Helen's faith was as yet undefined, although, in a moral aspect, she had learned to accept what was best put into practice by the leading thinkers of the day.

Knowing that the principles of good and evil must be supernatural, she had only grasped that they existed in nature—that the one made for happiness, and the other for misery; that the former had its analogy in light and regeneration, while the latter was synonymous with darkness and decay. How divine revelation alone could guide the seeker after truth to a firm grasp of the one, and render him superior to the reactionary influence of the other, she had not been brought to realise. The great religious teachers of the world had, she thought, evolved from the principles that ruled the natural world the doctrines which they taught. If, in the East, people had, thousands of years ago, been taught to be kind to all, and to lead lives of self-sacrifice, it was only the same knowledge, imparted, almost in the same word, which had come later to the West as populations emerged from barbarism. She saw that a moral code, framed upon such teaching, was necessary for all elevated human societies. She had never known affliction. Nothing but her mother's death had darkened her existence, and she had then been too young to feel it but momentarily. She had never experi-

enced great anxieties and perplexities. Golden sunshine lighted her whole existence, so that of the need of the immediate divine presence and guidance she had not yet been sensible. In indulging a feeling that elevated her own tone, and, at the same time, gratified another person, she felt no restraint, and she had, without considering eventualities, welcomed the new and pleasurable emotions which the attentions of Agnew had evoked. Although brought up himself from childhood in the faith of the National Church, his religious susceptibilities had rarely been awakened. Honourable in his own acts, he had always accepted other people, until they were found out, as animated by motives as good as his own; and in any attachment he might form, considerations about religion were not the first to be entertained. The tide of feeling which he was now experiencing was comparable to the onward and resistless flow of some placid river, on whose surface are mirrored the flowers and branches that grow upon its banks, the fleecy clouds and the blue vault in which they sail, but which is yet gathering in volume and strength day by day as it descends in its course to the ocean. Some new suggestion emanating from her physical grace, some fresh impression springing from the treasure-store of her memory, in this willing state of receptivity, found an instant reflection in his own mind, and the sympathetic tone and glance which she had become accustomed to use for him in all their intercourse contributed to swell his growing passion.

Caselli, the father, had imaged no particular future for his daughter. He loved her devotedly;

the sound of her footstep made his pulse beat faster. With her by him in his studio long hours of work were as nothing; and she, on her side, in return for his love and caressing indulgence, gave him her complete confidence and affection. He knew that in the natural course of events she would marry, and be as good as lost to him; but while cherishing a fervent desire for the happiness that he hoped awaited her, he had never dwelt upon the character and the circumstances of the husband he would wish her to have, and was in the habit of thrusting from himself the unwelcome thought of the separation that might come. He would, at all events, accept her choice, unless it were for one whom he knew to be unworthy, and, seeing her growing preference for Agnew, he did nothing to counteract it. The latter came and went freely, and his society was as genial to Caselli as agreeable to Helen.

One day Agnew and Helen had gone down by train to a Thames-side village, to row down to Windsor and to return by rail to Hampstead. In the capacity of a trusted friend he was to be in sole charge of her on this trip. They had lunch at a little hostelry on the river bank in a room all to themselves. Helen, in her dress of white flannel, trimmed with light blue, and her broad white straw hat caught up on one side to display her rippling tresses, appeared more attractive than ever; and a glass of Roederer which accompanied lunch had awakened a tinge of pink in her usually pale cheeks, suggestive of emotion, which was not indeed foreign to the surroundings in which she found herself. It was a pleasure to be out on this summer day, and it

was also a pleasure to be in the company of the man who was with her.

They had cast off from the inn, and were drifting down stream in their skiff, she at the helm and he quietly directing their course with the sculls. After an interval of silence he remarked,—

'Miss Caselli, have you ever realised what strange affinities exist in the world between people who seem to meet perhaps only for an hour, and by mere accident? Sometimes only in a crowd, when a responsive glance alone reveals the fact on the side of one whom we never see again?'

'I have the consciousness of it,' she replied, 'but I have met few with whom I have felt sympathy. It may be, in the larger world in which you live and move, that the existence of kindred souls have become more apparent to you than to me, who pass my days at the piano, or under the cedars of Heath Lodge, Hampstead. If you mean do I like some people and dislike others, perhaps I should say "Yes," but the feeling does not spring up at their very first approach; it takes time to grow.'

'Looking back upon my past life,' said Agnew, 'I can mark down here and there persons with whom I have at once and always been in sympathy, from the moment our eyes met or our hands were clasped. Some with whom I have frequently associated have proved lasting friends, and even those whom subsequently I have hardly met I have always cherished in memory. The mutual inclination in human nature to which I refer has its analogy in physics, in which we are

taught that certain elements tend to combine. It has always seemed to me that a truer order of things in our world would have been elicited had we always listened to the promptings of the soul —or heart, if you prefer to refer them to a physical organ—which have, I should imagine, their origin in the divine. But we are often restrained, it may be, by an excess of prudence, by social conventionalities, or by force of material circumstances, and our proper feelings thus resisted, there is a reaction, and we become wooden, mechanical, our susceptibilities dulled, and our course in life bent and forced into a wrong groove.'

'You think, then, that one should be the creature of impulse?'

'If it be good impulse, for the good of one or many, I should answer affirmatively.'

'But is not one liable to be misunderstood when one displays at short notice the feeling that often wells up in one's nature?'

'I say it is not to be so with those who cannot appreciate the pearls cast before them, but rather with those whose responsiveness betrays their real sympathy. On their part there is no misconception, no shadow of doubt nor disdain.'

She mutely acquiesced in this conclusion. Indeed, without ever having stated the argument in words, she had before comprehended its intuitive truth. But she had caught in English society the extreme reserve, not to say bashfulness, which has from time immemorial been a marked characteristic of its girls, and often seems to render them awkward and irresponsive. At this moment her slender white fingers were dipped in the water,

bringing a sensation of coolness in pleasant contrast to the hot June sun, which to-day had been rather overheating. It was setting now; perhaps it had struck upon her cheeks and reddened them; perhaps the rose lining of her sunshade produced the same effect; or was it that to-day she was for the first time a little embarrassed in Agnew's society? His glance seemed to penetrate her very thoughts. She felt uneasy lest he should discover too much. They were coming round the last bend of the river above Eton; in ten minutes they would be at Windsor Bridge. He might not after this be alone with her again this evening. He might, without risking everything, find out something of her real feeling for him.

'Helen,' he said, and it was the first time that he had used that name, and she flushed painfully, turned her violet eyes upon his for a moment, and then withdrew them to the battlements of the castle lighted with the last red gleam of sunset, 'have you ever known love?'

She found means to laugh with assumed carelessness, but the effort was an awkward one.

'I am not sure that I even know the meaning of the word, Mr Agnew. It exists in song and in romances, and seems to make the possessor very uncomfortable. It is the only word I can find to express what I feel for father—dear father, who has been the light of my life from my childhood; in this sense it means reverence, admiration and dependence. I don't know that it is fit to express all phases of affection. I have *liked* people, if that is what you mean—liked their society, been pleased with their smiles, and felt

grateful for their attentions. With some I have even felt happy to be alone.'

He looked up quickly, for the last sentence seemed to be specially directed to him. She was, however, looking towards the landing-stage, and busy with the tiller ropes. Her face was quite flushed, however, and she seemed glad to be helped out of her seat in the boat. The train would not leave for half an hour. Agnew invited the girl to linger on the bridge, where they leaned over the parapet, watching the willows waving over the shining stream, and skiffs and launches passing with their gay and happy freights. The twilight seemed to render them both more thoughtful than usual; a cool breeze stirred her golden hair and blew a tress across her companion's cheek. The soft touch and fragrance gave him fresh excitement. It was almost an omen of good fortune.

This time he spoke hurriedly, and as disturbed out of his usual composure.

'Helen, it was of myself that I wished to speak to-day—of yourself and myself too, and the whole time seems to have passed without my having asked the short question which has ever been in my mind. It is idle to try to conceal from you—you must know surely already—that I love you. I proposed our going out to-day that I might ask you if you can accept what I now offer you—my love, my life. I don't press you to reply at once. It may be that you want time to inquire of your own heart, if you have not yet thought of me in the way I want.'

She trembled all over and felt a choking sensation in her throat, which for a few moments she

could not conquer. She gazed into the placid depths below as if she could find her destiny pictured there in some mysterious way. But no light came to clear up her perplexity. Several moments passed before she said,—

'I cannot answer you to-day. I am proud that you should have thought of me as one you would choose for a—a wife. Let me wait, in mercy, a short time to think calmly.'

Helen's face was turned away so that Agnew could not see the expression which it bore, but in her tones there was a dreamy tenderness which gave him hope. He caught the soft, ungloved hand which rested near his upon the parapet of the bridge, and pressed it in response, and the excitement of feeling which both had experienced died away gradually as if borne upon the evening breeze.

As they whirled back to town by train, although alone together, he did not renew the subject. Helen was anything but composed. Once or twice Agnew thought her eyes were full of tears. He sat fronting her rather than by her side, so that she should feel no restraint in their altered relations one with another, and he spoke carelessly and indifferently of any topic that suggested itself as they sped upon their journey.

On arrival at Heath Lodge they found supper ready, and the two sat down, after changing their dress, with Caselli, the windows open to the lawn outside, with the fragrance of heliotrope wafted inwards, and the bright moon partly lighting up the room, where the lamps had, for coolness, been purposely turned low.

Caselli noticed the girl's silence and said,—

'Is my darling tired after her long day, or is she thinking over some great problem which she finds it hard to solve? Come, tell father what is sealing those red lips.'

She looked nervously at Agnew, as if asking him to help her, and then remembered that she had herself silenced him for a time. She smiled and laid her hand affectionately upon Caselli's shoulder.

'I am not sad, dearest father; I am but tired. I have had a happy day, and one that has left me with many pleasant memories. They were coming before my mind, as if conjured up on canvas by your own gifted brush. Forgive me. I should have remembered that you have been alone and want to be cheered.'

So the girl rose and poured out a glass of Chianti for each of the two men, and set herself to give her father some of the delicacies which were strewn about the table. Agnew could hardly remove his eyes from her this evening. In her puce-coloured satin dress, with its delicate white lace trimming, so cut and disposed as to partly bare her snowy and swelling bust, to display almost the whole of her well-moulded arms, and to outline the graceful limbs, the face of striking purity of expression, the limpid eyes of velvety softness, accentuated to-night by lines below of rather darker hue than usual—the whole made up a picture to him of the divine, and now that his feelings had found expression, they grew more intense each hour.

While the two men trifled with the supper, sipped their wine and lighted cigars, she went into the next room, leaving the door ajar, and

seating herself at the piano, sung in her melodious voice her favourite ballads, with no notion of coquetry towards her lover, but every note of which thrilled his whole nature.

As they parted that night, for a moment she held his hand in her two, casting down her eyes, and then released him. He turned his looks back to the house as he emerged from the garden gate and saw the slender figure at the French window opening to the lawn, and there was, he thought, a wave towards him of one white hand.

He preferred to walk back to St James's that night to taking a conveyance, that he might think over what had taken place. Had he analysed his feelings he might have discovered that the impression which Helen Caselli had made upon him was a sensuous one. Her character had not been formed. She had never been called upon to exercise her own judgment in the important affairs of life. She had never been tried by trouble. She had no great purpose in life which he might share with her. Helen's way of being brought up was to enjoy art and nature. She felt like one of a number of beautiful flowers in a *parterre*. She had grown up like one of them, nurtured in luxury and trained to be admired. What had redeemed her from insipidity was her quick intelligence, her quickly responsive temperament, and her keen discrimination between what was elevating and what was degrading, a gift grounded rather in her instincts than in a trained religious faculty. In a spiritual sense those two had never yet come upon a common basis, unless it can be said that a mutual love of what is beautiful makes that possible.

However, these considerations did not, in his present frame of mind, occur to Agnew. What engrossed his whole thoughts was her exquisite beauty of face and form, which he had never seen excelled; the grace of gesture and of movement, quite untaught and unstudied—the expression outwardly, in fact, of refined feeling; the frank simplicity and innocence that marked her speech; the loving, trustful look of the moist eyes, and the smile that played about parted lips and dimpled cheek that seemed caught from heaven above. To possess her as his wife, the ideal of physical beauty that he had formed long past, to know and to feel that his passion was reciprocated, to actually realise all that this promised to afford, captivated his senses at this juncture and left him no calm moments in which to critically review their respective positions.

Had he been too precipitate? Had an infatuation got the better of his reason? Was the overpowering passion he felt one that would last? Such questions, put mentally to himself as he paced homeward, were easily disposed of for the time. He had persuaded himself that their feelings were one, and, if sympathy existed, that was enough to justify a union for life. He thought that her own had not been evoked to the same extent as his; but in what had passed to-day he had discovered that her nature was tuned to respond to his, and her young and untried affections were turned the way he had desired to draw them. The glimmer of a new dawn was in the sky.

CHAPTER III

A DAY after the events of the last chapter, Agnew was dressing in his chambers in King Street when a letter arrived from Helen. It commenced without preamble, which suggested some hesitation on the part of the writer as to what form of address she should use. It ran,—

'I have been thinking deeply, throughout the long hours of a sleepless night, how to reply to you. Believe me, I am proud as any girl in the land to possess your love, and should, in any event, always be grateful that you have offered it to one who, you may be sure, feels so unworthy of it. I seem to be on the brink of a dark and fathomless gulf, without a guide to lead my tottering footsteps out of danger. Be kind and patient with me. Let one month pass ere I give you my answer. You said recently that business would take you to America. Go, now, and if you feel the same for me on your return as you do now, you shall come here to see me; but if only a passing fancy has prompted your words, and absence has changed you, believe me, I would fain that you recalled them, and though I may mourn you yet I shall willingly release you. HELEN.'

Agnew studied the letter for a full half-hour, wrote a brief reply to the effect that he understood

her, 'darling and best-beloved,' and would comply with her wish, but that, as for himself, his mind was made up.

His portmanteaus were packed the same day, and he was on his way to Liverpool to embark for New York.

A month actually passed without a word of intelligence of Helen. Save during the voyage, when his thoughts constantly reverted to her, and a mental vision of her in her surpassing beauty seemed ever before his gaze, he was sufficiently distracted by business arrangements at several places in the States to have somewhat foregone the intensity of his passion had it been transient or unreal. But he returned to London unchanged in feeling and unswerving in his determination to win the girl. It was, of course, his place to acquaint her of his arrival, and to ask when he could see her. He wrote at once, and begged for an immediate reply. It came by the night post, couched in the fewest possible words that a modest maiden in such a situation could use,—

'I await you to-morrow evening at seven.

'HELEN.'

She had chosen an hour when she would be dressed as he best liked to see her, and with her charms displayed to the utmost. He understood and enjoyed the construction he put upon her message. There was a further reason why the hour had suggested itself. It was that of twilight, when her confusion would be less evident, and her blushes could be better concealed than in the garish light of day. Agnew, feeling sure that he

would remain the evening at Heath Lodge, dressed for dinner, and hurrying off by cab, touched the bell almost within a minute of the time appointed. He was evidently expected, and passed into the drawing-room unannounced. The red light of the setting sun was shining through a tangled mass of clematis and wisteria, and cast a warm glow over the room, where, slightly in the shade of the lace curtains, to one side of the window, reposed the delicate figure of the girl in whom all his future seemed at this moment to be bound up. She was this evening in a light, gauzy fabric of white, with a string of pearls round her snowy neck. Her face was averted as she gazed into the garden, bashful as she was to seem to welcome his approach; her lips were parted, and her breath came and went hurriedly. Agnew advanced, after dwelling for a moment upon the pretty picture, to within two paces of her chair, and called her by name.

The girl rose, their eyes met, and he had an answer to his question in her look. She came to him and placed a hand upon each of his shoulders, saying,—

'George, you know why I am here to receive you. Whether I love you as a wife should I cannot, as a poor, untried little girl, know. But all that is bright and happy for me in life seems to be in you, and I yield myself, all that I have and prize, to you, now and for ever. Be kind and merciful to me, who am so weak and ignorant.'

She raised her dewy lips to be kissed, and, with his arms clasped round her lithe form, he pressed them long and often with his own. He seated himself, and drew her upon his knee with his arms still round her, while her head reposed upon

his shoulder, and her breath played upon his cheek. It was her first love, and the vehemence of his caresses almost startled her. She seemed to glow all over; but with her eyes cast down, and not under the scrutiny of his, she thought that she was content, nay, happy, to be in his arms. A long-cherished dream had taken shape, and she seemed to be borne away upon a golden river to lands radiant with eternal summer. Mere words could not have told her the meaning of it all, and, indeed, both thought the silent manner of love-making the more expressive. She said at last,—

'Speak to me, dearest; say that you love me no less now that I am yours.'

'Darling Helen, you have given me what all my life I have not yet had—the true love of a pure and beautiful girl. You are young—a child, who knows not the weary hours one spends amid the changing scenes, the anxieties, the empty pleasures of life, as one passes from youth to manhood, from manhood to middle age, devoid of that sympathy for which every soul longs. Do you think that I can repent now that I have won the ideal that for thirty years I have set before me? No! but it may be that you, in your childishness, may deem me grave and cold, and come to regret that you have not the ardent love and freshness of a boy sweetheart, of one who would play and toy with you.'

She interrupted him by placing a soft hand upon his lips, and raising her head, met his look with the lovelight of her violet eyes.

'Never say so again; it pains me. If you will always love me as you do now, I shall never change, even in thought, for a moment. Promise

me not to doubt. All that a woman can give I have resolved to freely give to you. Is not that a proof that I have no regrets? It has been said that we never change if our one love is constant and ever fresh. I believe that. George, be always to me as you are now, and I shall never waver. But one thought saddens me and comes to make bitter the sweetness of the moment. It is about dear father. We shall leave him. He will be alone. He cares for few people and will have none to take my place. Oh, George, help me in this trouble.'

The tears rolled slowly in a few large drops over the peach bloom of her cheeks, which Agnew dried with his handkerchief. He loved her the more for her sensitiveness and this evidence of her loving temperament. Kissing her lips again, he said,—

'Dearest little child, we will not lose him altogether. I feel I can hardly tell him what has happened. That it will be a deadly pain to him I fear; but we will try to make him hopeful. We shall often be in England—at anyrate, every two years. Then in the interval he must come to us sometimes in Ceylon. He will find studies for his brush that will enchant his soul, life and colour that await a master hand to be faithfully put upon canvas. And then there's you. You are to be made happy with a husband that I am sure your father likes and approves; and your future is of more concern to him than his present comfort. He thinks that every woman, if she meets her proper destiny, should be happily married; and, depend upon it, your own case has often been in his mind. Grieve not in anticipa-

tion, sweetest; we will try together to make the prospect a pleasing one to him.'

The front door bell rang, and raising her lips once more to his, she released herself from his embrace and seated herself at the piano, turning over the music somewhat at random.

The person to enter the house was Caselli himself, who had been out for his usual evening stroll when the fading light necessitated his brushes being laid by.

He came into the drawing-room, looked at both the lovers, and saw that they were embarrassed, but professed not to notice it. He advanced briskly towards Agnew, holding out his hand, and said,—

'My friend, I am delighted to see you after your long absence. You have come, I hope, to spend the evening with us, and to enliven us with tales of all you have seen and heard in America. Helen, doubtless, has heard much already.'

As her father turned towards her she failed to regain her composure, and left the room.

Agnew returned the greeting with warmth, and forced himself at once to make his confession to Caselli.

'I am delighted to be back, and thoroughly reciprocate your kind feeling. Now I must tell you why I appear here uninvited. You cannot be blind to the fact that the charm and grace of your daughter have, equally with your own kindness and hospitality, brought me here so often. She has become necessary to my happiness, and to give her time to think, to question with herself whether she loves me well enough to give me her heart, I have been away for a month, holding no word with

her. This evening I came for her answer, which has been given, and has brought me happiness such as I have never had, and to her, too, I trust. And now you must say, as her father—and there is none more devoted, I know—whether she shall be mine, whether your child shall be a happy wife, and have a strong arm to protect her for the rest of her life.'

Poor Caselli had turned pallid, and half felt his way to the nearest chair; he sat down and covered his face with his hands. Agnew remained standing, partly realising what pain he had given. He gazed out upon the lawn, where the tall pampas grass was waving its feathered tips in the evening breeze, an omen, he thought, of triumph. After a few minutes of deep silence the painter rose, his face, as it were, furrowed by a great sorrow, but composed in stern resolve. He passed his arm through Agnew's, and said,—

'George, I have seen this coming, but I hardly knew whether it was more than the play of a passing fancy. My lovely girl—lovely in face as in purity of mind—has been the priceless pearl which I have treasured as more to me than my art, my fame, and than all the world, since her mother left us. I may not, I know, keep her as my own. But must you take her far away beyond the seas so that my eyes may, perhaps, light upon her no more in this life? Tell me that I shall see her, that I may be near to you, and sometimes catch her tender look and hear her sweet voice.'

'It is useless to hide from you, Caselli, that I must return to Ceylon; my work has lain there for thirty years, and my fortune is bound up with the island. But if you will, you shall come with us, if

you will make your home with us. That would, indeed, fill the cup of happiness of the darling girl. Come, think of it. I have no selfish love for her which would seclude her from others but myself. We will hear what she will say. May I summon her?'

Caselli bent his head in response, and Agnew, touching the bell, asked the maid who attended to beg her mistress to come down.

Helen, on entering, saw that her father had been made aware of what had happened, and running to his side, knelt down by his chair, and taking his hand between hers, pressed it to her lips and placed it against her hot cheek. Caselli said,—

'My love, there is your husband, and a more worthy one I could not wish you. Under the grace of the Divine Power may you both be blessed. Your love for him will not make you forget your poor father, of that I am sure.'

The tone of inquiry and the broken voice in which the words were spoken caused the tears to well out of the violet eyes and drop upon his hand which the girl held.

'Never, dearest and best of fathers, who has held my hand and guided my steps from infancy, and has taught me all that is good and noble, will my love for you be less? Be with us when you can, give me the comfort of your presence often, for my pain at parting will be like yours, save that I have his love to soften it.'

The dinner hour was nigh and the lamps now being lighted, and although all that had passed had taken place in so brief a time, all three actors seemed to feel as if weeks, even months, had

slipped by, so new and strange was the fresh tide of feeling that had set in, and so different had become the aspect in which life presented itself under the altered conditions of all. To-day was boldly lettered in the calendar of their lives, from which was to issue a new series of events; a great mark had been set up upon the highway of their march through life, a starting-point for fresh hopes, new doubts, for weal or for woe. They had all felt the scene in the drawing-room to be rather painful, and a natural reaction set in when it was over. At dinner they were gay, and could bring themselves to talk about Helen's new home in Ceylon; the beauties of its scenery, the interests of its native races, the iridescent tints of its changeful skies, the varieties of its perpetual blooms on mead and forest tree, and the sparkling gems unearthed below its rugged peaks.

To the girl it was an enchanted land of which her conceptions had been heightened by the agreeable aspect in which she was to view it. Sunshine, colour and fragrance, to which her nature was to be rendered exquisitely susceptible by love.

They were married before a large number of mutual friends in an English church—that in which Agnew had been brought up. The girl had seldom attended a service, and upon her own marriage, with so large a crowd of spectators, herself the centre of observation, she felt strangely fluttered. Susceptible always to music and to artistic effect, she thought she had never felt so seriously emotional as at that moment. She seemed to be impressed more than she had ever been before with the sense of the new, the awful obligations she was

contracting. The presence of so many living witnesses, as it were, to her solemn promises intensified her feelings. She bore up with an effort and forced herself to be resolute. The words of the ritual were by no means new to her, for she had made a study of them for weeks before this day; but now, as an actor in this service, she seemed to interpret them by living light. She really did, in her own mind, faithfully subscribe to the promises which she was called upon to make. But without conviction as regards revealed truth she could hardly kneel at the altar rails and bend in prayer without a mental reservation. Even in this, the most solemn moment of her young life, the mode by which she was expected to approach God, the Creator, the Divine Power, 'through Jesus Christ,' was a matter of great perplexity.

Sometimes she had prayed when unhappy, and for all the good she enjoyed there was always a hymn of praise in her heart to the Almighty. So far as she knew, prayer was not heard unless its substance was in harmony with the natural order and sequence of forces continually in operation. One day she had asked her lover to explain to her what was meant by the mediation of Jesus Christ, and he failed, not having grasped the truth himself, in giving her a satisfactory reply. He believed that Jesus was a Divine Teacher who had suffered persecution for His apostleship. His life was lovely, and the truths He taught had penetrated the lives and institutions of the great nations of the West.

Helen was not satisfied with what she was told. When she came to dwell upon even the last reflection, it seemed to have a great deal in it that was

suggestive. But she forgot to ask in all sincerity to be spiritually taught what the truth was, to be strengthened to preserve it, when found, at all hazards. So for a time the impressions faded, and she remained what she had been—full of good impulses, but with uncultivated religious instincts —a heathen.

CHAPTER IV

THE time came for them to leave behind the sorrowing father and all the cherished memories of Helen's home at Heath Lodge. It was a grief in which she would fain have found some comfort in spiritual belief if she had possessed it. She felt no more under the divine protection than the cedars and pampas grass that stand upon the lawn. Philosophy lent no colour to the aspect of her future life. In the ordinary process of events she would see and know little again of her past home. Her father, now past middle age, must gradually decline, and the parting with her had hastened his course; she could see that. Was there no appeal to God to cause, by the operation of new or unknown laws, the arrest or the alteration of phenomena, the regular occurrence of which was patent to her senses, and, so far as she knew, inevitable? She knew of none such at this time, and in her own weakness and helplessness the pain of separation was like a stab which had no salve.

When she hung round her father's neck for the last time, she whispered but the word 'hope,' and tore herself away, feeling as a delicate plant perhaps feels when suddenly wrenched from its roots and cast ruthlessly upon the waves to be the sport of every wind.

On the voyage the Agnews fell in with several

Ceylon friends, among whom was Harold Norton, who had an estate up in the mountains by Adam's Peak.

Like most who came into contact with Helen, he was captivated by her great beauty and by her simplicity of mind. He constantly sought her society, and, gifted with pleasant manners and handsome appearance, soon rendered himself acceptable. Rather than appear to wish to seclude his wife or to seem to be jealous, Agnew gave her the utmost liberty, and apparently welcomed the advent of his old friend. The circumstances of a long voyage throw much together even the most incompatible people, and where there is inclination for an intimacy, nowhere can it be better indulged. After a few days Norton could scarcely think of anyone else on board the ship but his friend's wife. The long tropical evenings were the most enjoyable, when, in the growing darkness, everyone sought the deck, and dressed in cool attire, sat or walked, and felt their best in the welcome breeze caused by the speed of the steamer's motion.

Norton and Mrs Agnew one night were leaning over the taffrail watching the last red glow of the sunset behind the rugged and forbidding mountians of the Red Sea littoral. He said,—

'Mrs Agnew, we shall prize you in Ceylon. I do not think your husband could, if he had tried, prepared a pleasanter surprise for us colonists when he decided to bring you out. I hope you will be able to come up country sometimes and see his old friends.'

'You may be sure, Mr Norton,' she replied, 'that his friends will be mine too. Our interests are too much in common for it to be otherwise. We have

few thoughts which we do not share. Ceylon is to be my new home, and I shall, I am certain, learn to like the many people there for whom my husband has an affection.'

'Have you left any special friends behind you?'

'I have known few whom I could exactly call friends. A number of people used to come to my father's house whose society was pleasant—mostly men who moved in artistic and literary circles in London. They met to exchange ideas which their work had suggested, or to discuss the more striking phenomena of the day. I am afraid I am a little spoilt for the ordinary frivolities of the drawing-room and the tea-table.'

'I hope,' Norton said, 'you will let me be a frequent guest. A man alone, and in my line of life, has many dull moments. In company with a woman like you, one feels refreshed—I should say renovated—in spirit. Your tone and refinement lift a man above the coarser pastimes to which he generally resorts when a gentle woman's influence is wanting.'

'I am sure my husband would wish you to see us often,' Helen replied, slightly smiling at the stilted notion of herself that he was aiming to give. 'I think, without my asking him, that you may always look for a welcome.'

'I should like to be a special friend, if I might dare to think myself such, but I will trust to my luck for that.'

'I do not know what you imply in that term, Mr Norton. I have no "special friends" at present, and can promise you no privileges. I intend that my husband and I should think alike. Be natural, and you will be nice.'

'I did not mean to imply anything you would not find acceptable; but abroad, somehow, one generally, by an insensible process, selects a few people to whom one grows attached by "affinity," I think. Ultimately, one often learns to love, but I do not mean to say that it prompts only one sort of feeling. Do not you think that one can love in several ways?'

Her thoughts went back to her old home, to the grey-haired father, now perhaps pacing the lawn under the cedar trees, and she sighed, saying rather sadly,—

'Yes, I do know something of what you mean. I have two loves even now, but in your wide sense I cannot agree—my world has been so small, your experiences no doubt so many. Perhaps you are able to parcel your heart out in small pieces. That seems to me to leave devotion out of sight. We must search ourselves to see whether we be true. But I like you; I think I shall always like you.'

'I am charmed, Mrs Agnew, to think that you will show me some sort of preference. I am proud.'

Her white hand was lying on the rail near his, and in the darkness he laid his upon it. She snatched hers away immediately, and said,—

'I did not say that, Mr Norton. I think we will go into the saloon; there is some music this evening.'

She turned away rather vexed, especially with the liberty he had taken. Indeed, she resented the familiarity it implied on the part of one who was the acquaintance of a few days only. She did not know whether or no she ought to mention it to

her husband. It would, she reflected, however, make him angry; there would be a scene with Harold Norton; and here, on board ship of all places, it would be intensely disagreeable. In her own happiness she rather pitied him, too, without anyone to love; so she decided to remain silent.

For a few days Helen managed to avoid being alone with Norton, and pointedly remained as much as possible by her husband's side. His habit was to read a great deal, while she would occupy herself with the little contrivances in the way of fancy work which save the owner from the reproach of being idle, but of which there is so little to show for the time and talent spent upon them.

To relieve the monotony of the long run through the Indian Ocean, dramatic performances were got up, and the young bride could not escape being enlisted for them. Her parts seemed constantly to throw her with Norton, and often in tender situations. He took ample advantage of the opportunities afforded him in the rehearsals to be realistic. Indeed, nothing could have pleased him better than to have to make love, if only in the exigencies of the drama, to his beautiful companion. She herself took a girlish pleasure in it in all simplicity, and responded for the nonce without reserve. If she had been a practised artist she might have noticed that Norton's attentions were too pronounced, and too frequently in evidence. However, it did not enter her imagination that they had any great significance, and consequently took no further steps to discourage them. She certainly enjoyed his admiration. It flattered her

to know that others than her husband thought her lovely. Still, it did not make her waver in her allegiance to him.

But Norton had, in the few weeks of their lives on board ship, become the victim of a passion that was all the stronger because it was a forbidden and a secret one, and by the time they reached Colombo every moment that he could not spend in the company of Helen and bask in her smiles seemed irksome and profitless. Matters stood thus at the time at which our story opens. Agnew had done nothing to check the intercourse which had become so frequent between his wife and Norton. He felt too sure of her attachment, of her constancy—it might be said of her devotion—to be in any way uneasy at the very apparent familiarity that had been established.

CHAPTER V

Dharmaputa, the Buddhist priest, would leave his monastery near Matila for three months every year, and spend a portion of the time in Colombo. Panabokki's family looked forward to his annual visit. He had been the teacher of Panabokki in his childhood, and still remained his spiritual adviser. Combined with great strictness of moral life and severe simplicity of manners, he had a profound knowledge of the world and acute insight into human nature—presented to him as it was in the native world of Ceylon in such varied types. He possessed, besides, an extensive acquaintance with the Buddhist holy books, as well as of the historical records of the island. In rigid conformity with the rules enjoined for monks, he permitted himself no indulgences except in times of sickness, and his usual *régime* barely sufficed to maintain his bodily health. He was, under these circumstances, regarded by all with much reverence, and especially by the Panabokki family, who had the privilege of his intimate acquaintance. When he spoke, which was not often, they all seemed to wait open-mouthed upon his words, and his opinions upon mundane as well as religious matters were received as almost indisputable. He was advanced in age, and with his shaven head, his face shrunken from long abstin-

ence, with half-closed eyes weary with many vigils, and clothed in his yellow robe, he presented an admirable picture of an old ascetic. With all his study, with all the philosophy which he had evolved in years of meditation, with the exercise of all his unusual powers of observation, with constant adherence to the rules of his order, he yet felt but a spiritless resignation to inevitable destiny. What the issue of this long life of self-suppression was to be was unknown to the aged priest. It might be that his earnest endeavours would secure him a subsequent existence of a higher type than the present, but of this he was even uncertain. No revelation had come to him to enlighten him in his passage to the Unknown. He had, indeed, by sedulous forgetfulness of sensual impulse, schooled himself into unnatural calm, but his was a mentally vacuous repose, untroubled indeed by the passions of the world, but yet uncoloured by such hopes as appeal directly to all human nature. At times his innate geniality would assert itself, and, particularly in the society of his friends, their affection and sympathy would appeal to and draw out of his heart that which his long life of asceticism had been unable to destroy. He would unbend, and enter into their simple enjoyments, and discuss with them their worldly plans.

It was during one of his visits that Kirimanica entered hastily from school in the evening, and excitedly going up to her mother, said,—

'Mother, the Reverend Superior has proposed to take us all next Sunday to St Lucia's Cathedral to the service. The Vicar Apostolic is to preach. But we are to ask our parents for permission

before her reverence can do so. Mother, I should so like to go. Do not refuse me.'

The mother hesitated, not knowing how to reply in the presence of Dharmaputa. She was occupied in dusting the ornaments which stood upon the ebony cabinet at the back of the room. There was silence for a few moments, when she suddenly turned, and said,—

'What does the Mahanúnánsé counsel?'

Dharmaputa's eyes seemed to be directed to the inscrutable future, but he replied,—

'If it were to learn the truth the girl should go; but she has heard it from her childhood. A follower of the Lord Buddha knows nothing of the bloody sacrifice which is held up to worship in the Christian churches, and by which the Christians think themselves saved. It rests with you, her mother, to guide her.'

He gathered up his yellow robe, took his fan in his hand, and left, followed by the boy disciple who usually accompanied him.

The child saw that the time was unfavourable and stole away to her room to prepare her lessons for the next day. She was accustomed to be restrained in many ways now that she was growing into womanhood, and it excited no discontent within her. It seemed but to excite speculation, and led her to indulge in dreams, where her active interests could have no play.

She industriously applied herself to her books, and by the time that the golden rays from the west were lighting up the tall palms behind the house, she had finished, and reposing her graceful figure in an easy-chair, lifted her eyes to the summits of the trees, where a noisy congress of

crows was taking place prior to the disappearance of the birds for the night. She thought that the more she learned every day, and the wider became the vista of her future life, the more difficult was it to bring herself to think of an indissoluble union with Rámbanda, so uncultivated and unimaginative, and to be hidden from the outer world away in a deep valley among the hills at Matila. This impending destiny seemed to hang like a cloud over her young life. She felt sure that she would never be coerced into this marriage by her parents, but still their wishes were strong, and it would go hard with her to disregard them. She sighed in her helplessness. The sky had reddened, and the neutral tints were now in the ascendant. The brass lamps with the flaming wicks, used in the back of the house, were being lighted. Her father had just returned from the Court, and was heard in the next room as he moved about, changing his dress.

Suddenly there was an unusual noise in the road just outside the garden gate, a crash of vehicles colliding, of restive horses, and the cries of alarmed natives. The mother and daughter hurried to the front verandah, while Panabokki and the man-servant ran down the walk to see what had occurred. In the growing darkness of the evening two carriages had crossed each other, and the one, a dog-cart driven by a young Englishman, had been upset, and the driver thrown forcibly to the ground. Panabokki's servant bore a light and shed its light upon a senseless figure which lay upon the road, surrounded by a crowd of natives from the neighbouring bazaar. The horse-keeper had

control of the horse, and the ready assistance of the bystanders, always offered in an Eastern town, had enabled, in a few minutes, the cart to be righted. But the figure no one liked to touch until Panabokki pushed his way through the crowd, and, pressing the aid of two onlookers, raised the fair head which was prone in the dust, a trickle of blood from the nostrils showing the severity of the impact. They staggered up the garden path with the senseless burden, and, entering the house, deposited it upon the sofa in the front room. Panabokki motioned to the women to withdraw. But their curiosity was too great to allow them to go further than the inner doorway, from which they would occasionally peep in order to see what was going on. The man-servant was sent with a message to the nearest doctor, and for a short time no one was in waiting to afford help to the master of the house but his wife and child. He unfastened the collar and shirt of the young man, and called for water. Kirimanica, who was palpitating with alarm and surprise, ran to fetch what was wanted, and returned, bearing a brass basin and a soft, white cloth, gazing with interest upon the handsome features, the clear skin, the fair hair and manly form of the patient. Her father soaked the cloth in the water, wrung it out, and applied it gently over the brow and face, and to the top and back of the head. The bleeding at the nose still continued, and had to be staunched by the same means. A few drops fell upon the covering of the sofa beneath, and Panabokki, lifting the young Englishman, passed a towel below him. The bathing was continued in silence for a quarter of an hour. The outer doors had

been shut to prevent the curious from intruding, and the apprehension of the inmates as to the ultimate results of the accident increased each moment. Suddenly the eyes slowly opened, and gazed in bewilderment at the surroundings, and at the figures bent over him. What seemed to attract them most was the beauty of the girl standing by his side, as she held the basin in both hands, with the water now stained red with his blood; the intense look of sympathy, not unmixed with admiration, brought a responsive, although almost imperceptible, smile to his lips. It was indeed a pretty picture that met his eyes. He exclaimed,—

'Where am I? What has happened?' and endeavouring to lift himself, he felt at once an acute pain in his head, which elicited a groan. The girl's eyes were tearful, and her breath came and went quickly.

Panabokki said,—

'Lie still, sir, until assistance arrives. You have been thrown from your carriage, and perhaps injured badly. A doctor has been sent for. No doubt your friends will remove you if it can be done safely.'

The young man again closed his eyes, and a painful stillness pervaded the room. Panabokki motioned to the girl and to his wife, who stood with a ewer of fresh water in her hands, to withdraw, and seated himself in a chair near the couch. He had never received English people in his house, and felt rather annoyed with himself that he had allowed the privacy of his family to be thus intruded upon. However, it had been a duty to him as a Buddhist to help one in distress, and of a

quick, sympathetic temperament, he felt compassion for the sufferer.

The others were outside in the passage leading to the back rooms, speaking in low whispers. They knew little of foreigners in a social sense, and their surprise and curiosity had no bounds at this moment. Who could he be? Would he have to stay here? Or would it be safe to remove him? Would there be any public inquiry into the accident, and would they be dragged from their seclusion to give evidence? It was a perplexing situation, and the girl felt so troubled that she clasped her mother's hand for safety.

The victim of the accident was sufficiently collected to understand that he was in a strange position. He had never before been inside a native house—that is to say, in one inhabited by people of consideration socially. He noted the indications of refined taste in the few pictures and ornaments that were arranged about the room, and the grace with which some arum lilies and ferns were arranged in a vase by the window. In Colombo the English and Singhalese were so separate—perhaps each so conservative in habit—that he hardly knew how the latter lived. This evening a new interest had arisen for him. The master of the house had certainly been most kind. None of his own people could have done more in this emergency. And again, this girl was charming. There must be more beauty in the race than he had supposed. Panabokki had arranged on the table some restoratives which his wife had produced from a cupboard and sent in quietly by the hand of the servant, and seeing the young man move restlessly, he mixed and

made him drink a small glass of brandy and water.

A knock was heard at the door, and the bars being withdrawn, the doctor entered, spoke in an undertone to Panabokki, and, after examining the patient, went outside with the former and said that the young man must be removed to the hospital in a litter, and probably after treatment for a week or two would be about again. The conveyance was shortly brought and placed by the side of the sofa in order that removal might be effected with as little pain as possible. Although bidden to be silent, the young man could not forbear to express his gratitude. He murmured,—

'I shall always remember your kindness, your great kindness, sir, to a stranger; forgive me that I cannot say more now. I should like to thank the ladies, if I may.'

Panabokki, rather reluctantly, called in his wife and daughter, who, casting their eyes downward, advanced to the side of the sofa. The young Englishman extended his hand feebly and took that of the elder and younger in turn. He noticed that both were well favoured, and thatof the girl was particularly cool and soft. His grasp was warmer than hers, which was scarcely demonstrative, and lasted longer than she expected, evidently, for she raised her eyes suddenly in surprise and met his with rather a frightened look. He said,—'I thank you cordially, ladies, for your extreme kindness, and feel honoured by your presence.'

Both were quite unable to reply, being thoroughly discomposed by the circumstances of

the evening, and by never before having been brought into contact with an Englishman. They withdrew. The master apologised.

'They are unused to see English visitors, but they are glad to have helped you.'

The litter was arranged, the curtains drawn, and, a man preceding the conveyance with a lantern, the patient was borne away into the darkness.

The members of the family and the two servants all pretended to be going about their usual occupations for the rest of the evening, but were all thoroughly upset by the extraordinary incident which had occurred. The dinner was quite deranged, and although served as usual, the only edible articles were vegetable curry and rice. Panabokki was in a manner vexed that a total stranger should have had access, even by accident, to his house in such an intimate way, with the women present. He believed that most Englishmen lived rather free lives, and it annoyed him to reflect that his daughter had been brought into contact with one who, he could not help seeing, was particularly attractive. Her curious mind and adventurous spirit would receive a fresh stimulus from the unusual and exciting events of the evening. He hasily finished his meal, lighted a cigar, and, seating himself in an arm-chair, took up the newspaper. His wife went outside, after the table was cleared, to have a good talk with the servants over the whole matter. The girl took up her books as usual, but found herself too distracted to read. She was full of speculation about the stranger, as to who he was, whether he would come there again, how he was doing, and why he shook hands with her, a quiet, obscure little thing,

so impressively. Her eyes were constantly upon the sofa. The others, perhaps, had not noticed the fact, but she could see three little dark spots, just below the cushion, where his blood had dropped. She could picture him lying there now. What beauty there was in that blonde hair, those blue eyes, and the fair skin, when compared with the dark tints of those of her native land. What he said, too, seemed to come straight from his heart, and its truth to shine out of his eyes. She could believe anything he would say to her like that. There was no pretence in his address. And how sad it was to see him, so full of muscular strength, lying helpless! They had succoured him, however; even she had done so herself. Would he remember that? Hardly was it possible that, moving in such different spheres, she would meet, even see, him again. Perhaps the whole incident would be a memory only to him. But she liked to think that her humble offices would not be quite forgotten.

That night, after the strange event of the evening, Kirimanica felt disinclined to sleep. The back door of her room opened to the small garden behind the house, which was thickly planted with cocoa-nut trees and hedged on both sides, to prevent intrusion from the neighbouring properties, with thick bushes overgrown with convolvulus. The little place was almost secluded from observation, but the hedges being in parts only breast high permitted a glimpse of the adjoining houses. The moon gave sufficient light to tempt the little maid to step out upon the grass and to turn her eyes hesitatingly upon the glistening foliage and half-closed flowers that bounded the view

almost on every side. She felt differently to-night to what she had ever done before. Something had seemed to stimulate her imagination, and in an unexplained way to cause her pulses to beat more quickly than was usual. She looked up at the fleecy clouds flying across the sky and intercepting the light now and again, and tried to weave a coming romance out of their fantastic shapes. The sound of music stirred her soul as the last cloud disappeared and the full radiance of the moon fell upon her delicate features, and the happy coincidence came to her as a good omen. The night was so still that the words of the singer, in glorious voice, were borne to the girl from the open windows of the next house:—

'There is no life that hath not held some sorrow,
There is no soul but hath its secret strife;
Still our eyes smile, our hearts pray for to-morrow,
Fair in its promise of more perfect life.'

The child listened, insensible to all other feelings, so much had the melody blended with the peculiar impression she had received that evening. She wrapped her muslin robe tightly around her, and, barefooted, advanced to where she could see through a break in the hedge across the lawn to Lotus Hall, which was brilliant with many lights. The music was there, and many people were sitting in the verandah and standing in the doorway. Some, attracted by the fineness of the night, were sitting out on the lawn.

The handsome dresses and sparkling jewellery of the ladies shone out against the dark background of the foliage, and the unaccustomed sight filled the girl with interest, and perhaps excited in

her a little envy. How beautiful they looked, with their fair hair and snowy bosoms! and how wholly free and unfettered they seemed to be! While she watched, one more beautiful than the rest emerged from the drawing-room in company with a tall man, distinguished by handsome features and dark moustache. The two were Helen and Harold Norton. She seemed to be playing nervously with her fan, and to cast her eyes downwards. They sauntered down the verandah, and turned the south angle into the fernery. Pendant lights, distributed among the feathery foliage, revealed what was passing within. They had stopped before a trail of orchid blossoms, and seemed to be admiring their beauty, when he sought her right hand with his, and held it while he spoke. She had avoided his look, and her face was averted, and it seemed to Kirimanica as if she strove to release her hand. He stooped and kissed it. After a minute she turned towards her companion, with heightened colour in her face, and said something which caused him to loosen his grasp, and they turned rather hurriedly and rejoined the company. The girl noticed that another man, apparently the master of the house, watched their approach rather pointedly, although engaged in conversation with some of the guests, and she thought that for a moment he looked angry. How strange it all was! how delightful to be free from the irksome restraints common to women of her own race! And this was the world in which the young man moved who had that evening lain in their house! A denizen of this higher and brighter world, it was scarcely possible that he would stoop even to know her family

again, and yet the words he spoke sounded honest, and the look of his eyes was true.

The party was breaking up, carriages rolling down the avenue, and dispersing right and left on the Colpetty Road. A gong banged out the midnight hour. The girl stole silently to her room, and there was just a sigh as she threw herself on her couch, after casting off her wrapper, and murmured, 'Lord Buddha, protect us.'

CHAPTER VI

NEXT morning, at the early breakfast of the Panabokki family, the events of the past evening were, of course, the continued topic of conversation. They were curious to know who the young Englishman could be. No name had been left. Of course, it could be ascertained by inquiry at the hospital, and the wife thought that the circumstances demanded that the master of the house should call there to ask after the patient's health. Were he one of their own people it would be done. But Panabokki was disinclined to move out of his usual groove, and especially averse to seeming to intrude among English people. It might lead to an impression that he desired further acquaintance. And yet it would appear unfeeling to display no interest in the young man's condition. He was perplexed, and his wife and daughter, in their inexperience, could offer no suggestion. Kirimanica sat silent, her eyes dreamily directed to the heaving waves which broke out far from their house upon the beach. She was, in truth, afraid to speak for fear of betraying the feeling that possessed her. The mother, when breakfast was finished and the master was preparing to go to his work, laid her hand on his shoulder and said,—

'I think it will be well to send Antone to the hospital to ask after the gentleman, and he shall

carry some flowers as our token of respect and kind inquiry.'

Panabokki turned, and replied smilingly,—

'Clever wife, you have thought of the best way, and have solved the difficulty. Let it be so, and send the best flowers that can be got.'

Kirimanica felt the blood rush to her cheeks, but hardly changed colour, which is an uncommon thing with her race, and jumped up to help in this little enterprise. They had not sufficient choice flowers in their own garden for the purpose, that was clear. She cut all the arum lilies they possessed, and Antone, from his friend, the gardener at Lotus Hall, obtained some more, while Kirimanica, making a short excursion down the road to a schoolfellow's house, secured some marigolds and zinnias. In half an hour they had ready a beautiful bouquet, set in graceful edging of maiden-hair fern. To tell the truth, the girl did most of it with her own hands, and bound the stems in wet moss, in order to keep the flowers fresh while in transit to the hospital. It was placed in a basket, and over the top of that was placed a handkerchief of her own, well sprinkled with water.

Antone put on a clean white jacket to make his appearance respectable, and presented himself at the front door, umbrella in hand, to start upon his errand. It was half-past nine in the morning, and the sun's rays were ardent. The wife of Panabokki gave her instructions to Antone, which were to take the flowers to the hospital, and to ask the attendant to deliver them to the injured gentleman who last evening lay in Panabokki's house, and to inquire from the master how he was doing.

The girl was now on her way to school, and for

a short distance on the road would walk with Antone. She had her eyes fixed upon the basket of flowers, and remarked,—

'Antone, the sun is hot, let the flowers be under the shade of your umbrella. Do you think they will keep fresh until you reach the hospital?'

'Yes, miss; trust Antone to hurry. It will not be half an hour before the gentleman has them.'

'What are you going to say, Antone?'

'My master, Panabokki, has sent these flowers to the English gentleman who was brought to his house wounded last night, and master wants to know how he is.'

'Is that all you are going to say?'

'What would you have me do more, miss?'

She looked down to the ground for a few minutes as they paced rapidly forward, then said,—

'He might want to know who put the flowers together.'

Antone looked puzzled, and began to feel that his power of memory was being overtaxed. The girl watched him closely, and remarked,—

'I think you ought to see the gentleman if you can, and deliver what you carry. We all feel sorry for his hurt. You could tell him that. And then his name we know not. He forgot to acquaint us. Those attending upon him will be able to say it.'

Antone stared at the girl with some surprise, and said,—

'Good!'

They had arrived at the door of the schoolhouse of Santa Maria. She stooped and lifted the handkerchief to view the flowers below, inhaled their sweet perfume, and, satisfied that they were still in pristine freshness, tenderly replaced the cover-

ing. Suddenly a thought occurred to her, and she dived in her school bag for her purse, which, being opened, revealed one silver piece, long preserved there from the last feast day. She held it to Antone, saying,—

'This will pay for a ricksha. I think you ought to go quickly, Antone, this hot morning, or the flowers will wither. Remember all I have told you.'

He readily seated himself in the conveyance procured near at hand, and the girl having watched him from the doorstep until he was out of sight, abstractedly, and, for the first time, a little unwillingly, turned into the convent.

The period of morning school was three hours. They seemed to Kirimanica that day to be longer than she had ever known them. She was also called to attention several times by the teachers, which had never before been necessary. Something, too, had happened to her to change her feeling towards her companions. Hitherto they had all been children together. Now she seemed to have become distanced from the little amusements and trivial interests in which they had all been wont to find their pleasure. It was as if her past life had been a loitering in some secluded alley in the forests, and that she had emerged unexpectedly upon the summit of a hill, from whence there was a vision of an undreamt-of landscape, resplendent in the tropical sun with vivid hues and glittering streams unlimited in bounds, but failing to be wholly grasped by the untutored eye. There had been a want, sometimes a craving, in her young nature, which seemed suddenly to have been met in a measure—a new hope which she could nurture within herself.

Kirimanica jumped up from her seat with alacrity as the convent bell rang the half-hour past noon, and hurried home. Her mother was seated working in the front room, and Antone preparing the things for lunch in the back verandah. The look of inquiry in the girl's face escaped the elder woman, whose thoughts were intent upon a subject other than that which occupied her daughter's mind. The latter, putting down her books, and coming to where her mother sat, stood rather behind her, as if to conceal herself from view, and placing her arm round her mother's neck, said,—

'Dear mother, did Antone come back?'

'A long time since, my daughter; he is now at his work.'

'Did he give our flowers, and how was the gentleman?'

'The flowers were accepted, and the gentleman is said to be doing well.'

Was that all? The girl felt a chill of disappointment. She withdrew her arm from the affectionate embrace and remarked,—

'That is good news, mother, is it not?'

Kirimanica found Antone more communicative. She sat in a chair in the verandah while he was cleaning the china and glass. She said,—

'Did you reach the hospital in good time, Antone?'

He stopped in his work of polishing a plate and replied,—

'Yes, miss, very soon after your school-time. I was kept waiting ten minutes. At first nobody knew what gentleman was asked for. At last a nurse came out, and I told her. I begged to see the gentleman who was hurt in the

Colpetty Road last night, and whom Panabokki tended.'

'Yes, Antone,' said the girl, her eyes dilated with curiosity; 'and did she take you to the gentleman?'

'She said at first that she had better deliver the flowers. The doctor does not like strangers coming inside, and the gentleman was quiet and should not be disturbed. But just then a bell rang, and the gentleman's own servant came out to fetch the nurse, who was wanted for some purpose in the ward. I told the servant my errand, and begged his help.'

'Well, and what then happened?'

'We went inside. The gentleman was lying on the bed with his face turned to the wall. The servant spoke gently, and his master turned slowly. He was very pale, and his head was bound with white cloth.'

'And did the master then learn why you had come, and from whom?'

'The servant stooped, and lifting the handkerchief, showed the flowers to the gentleman. They were fresh and fragrant. The gentleman seemed pleased. He said, in a low voice, "Who has sent these?" The servant looked at me.'

'Yes, Antone,' said the girl, hurriedly, for she felt her heart beating faster than usual. 'And what did you say?'

'I told the gentleman that the ladies of the house where he lay last night had sent them, and hoped that he was doing well. I said the young lady placed the handkerchief over the flowers to shade them from the sun. He took the handkerchief and looked at it all over, and replied,

smiling, " What is the name?" I told him " Kirimanica." He said, " A pretty name. Tell the ladies I thank them for their kindness. I will come in person soon; I am getting better." The nurse came in and ordered me to leave and not to disturb the gentleman further. I turned to go, and found the cloth was not with the basket. The flowers were put on the table by his bedside. The gentleman's hand rested on the handkerchief, which was lying on the bed. I whispered to the servant to get it, and he withdrew it gently and gave it to me. I left and came straight home.'

The girl seemed to restrain her impatience, and to attempt an air of indifference in the presence of Antone, but high up on her cheeks was a bright flush making itself seen through the olive tint of her skin, which the observant old man noticed. She said carelessly,—

'You did everything quite right, Antone. I think I had better take the handkerchief. Where is it?'

'With the basket on the shelf, miss.'

She mounted upon a chair to reach the article, and while her back was turned to the servant, she said,—

'You did not ask the name of the gentleman, Antone?'

'Yes, the gatekeeper told me—Mister Charles Gray, magistrate at Matila.'

She started as she folded the handkerchief, and retreated to her own room. From her infancy Matila was, from their family associations, the one place that she knew and loved best, and around which so many of her memories centred. It was strange, this coincidence. The handkerchief was

put away in a box containing some other treasures, to be a souvenir of one of the startling occurrences in the girl's life. She said no more then either to her mother or to Antone.

They had lunch, and she took her books and went to the convent as usual, forcing herself to pay her wonted attention to lessons, and making a strong effort to disassociate her mind from the vivid impression which had been made upon it. In company with the other children, and joining in their innocent sports, she partly succeeded this afternoon. But at the evening meal the feeling of interest she experienced for the young Englishman was awakened again with fresh force, for the proceedings of the morning had to be rehearsed for her father's benefit. Antone, while serving at the table, was called to give his account again, in reply to a series of questions. The incident of the handkerchief he chose to forget, and he omitted to tell that he had communicated the girl's name to the gentleman. He knew that Panabokki would not have liked it, reticent and exclusive as he was with English people. The girl remained this time quite silent during the narrative, but below the cloth her hands were clasped tightly, to assist her to remain apparently impassive. She did not quite mind that Antone should tell the whole story, but yet she preferred that the little details he left out should not be discussed. They seemed to be her very own property.

The husband expressed his satisfaction that the attempt to be polite had been appreciated, and, smiling at his wife and daughter, said they had done well. The girl, lifting her eyes at the moment and catching her father's glance, felt a

throb of pleasure, and, moving from her chair went behind him and put her arms round his neck—a caress fondly received, but which rather perplexed and surprised Panabokki, whose trained perceptive faculties were constantly directed to fathom the motives of other people. He laid his hand upon the girl's two as they lay crossed on his bosom, but said no more.

During the evening his wife referred to the request made by Kirimanica to be allowed to attend the service at the Catholic cathedral with the other pupils of the school, under the escort of the reverend directress. She said that as her school-fellows were going, she considered the child might go too. They had resolved already that she was not to be kept in ignorance of what other people than they did and thought.

Panabokki was enjoying his cigar, was at his ease in an arm-chair, and did not feel inclined to be too severe, but he remarked,—

'I fear for the little daughter to be perverted from our faith. I should grieve if what she chance to hear in Christian churches make her otherwise than she is—good and simple, like her mother. It would seem as if the religion of Western people produced a freedom of manners which, introduced among us, would destroy what we love best in our women—modesty and fidelity.'

He waited to see if the words would effect a change in his wife's purpose.

'I have no wish to see the dear child different from what she is. Oh, that she might always be the innocent delight of our lives under the blessing of the Lord Buddha! But to deny her lawful desires goes hard. Seeing that others in our neigh-

bours' families are to go by wish of the Mother Superior, she may feel herself treated harshly. She will say nothing, but she will lay the refusal to heart, I fear.'

Kirimanica just then entered the room, and her father, looking upon her lovely face, with its gentle expression, felt something that forced him to yield if it were to give her pleasure. So he told her she had permission to attend the service at St Lucia's.

CHAPTER VII

It was that beautiful season in Colombo when the frequent rain-showers impart a welcome coolness to the air, and temper the heat which the ground frequently gives up; when the varied tints of the luxuriant trees present the most striking contrasts; when the scarlet blossoms of the acacias and the mauve of the tulip trees are beginning to peep forth, and every garden is ablaze with red shoe flowers and allamanders. The atmosphere is so laden with moisture that the sun at rising and setting lights the heavens with iridescent hues such as flash from the opal, and the placid lake and stormy sea reflecting the changing gleams, a strange blend of colours of indescribable beauty seems to be pictured forth in mid-air. On the beach, the tempestuous waves raise a mist of spray, which floats across the promenade and renders dim the picturesque line of coast that sweeps for some leagues away to the rocky promontory of Mount Lavinia.

It is a season that brings down the foreign residents of the island from far-away homes upon the mountains, where tea and coffee flourish, or from the interior verdant valleys, where palms and cocoa shrubs bear their wealth of fruit.

A round of amusements in a few short weeks serves to compensate for the isolation and cheerlessness of life upon distant mountain-tops.

Helen had, upon her introduction to the new life in the Tropics, with the sense of poetry in her nature, thrown herself enthusiastically into her new surroundings. Her own tastes were in sympathy with them. Her love of nature's beauties found endless sources of gratification. The music in which she could best express her feelings seemed here to have acquired fresh and more intense meaning, and for a time had become a solace to her, upon lonely days, that nothing else could be. The gentle manners of the new people who surrounded her, and the attractive beauty of the brown and half-clothed children, won her affection, and although she could speak to them but little in a foreign language, her kindly heart, evinced in her looks and very ways had seemed to establish a sympathy with them. Above all, the tender love of her husband, although she saw him so little, and it was demonstrated infrequently, had rendered active the responsiveness that she possessed to so great a degree. Time had, however, brought reflection, and she had often asked herself, except to please him, at such times as he was at leisure to be pleased, for what practical use she lived in these luxurious surroundings? Everything was lovely, and sense was perpetually gratified, but when all that was lavished upon her had been enjoyed to the full, what was left? She often confessed—only insipidity. She had asked to be employed, but her husband laughed at the notion of her sharing his business details with him. Could she help the people round her? That was difficult. They received her approaches with deference but with surprise, and her inability to speak their language rendered communication

almost impossible. They feared, too, that she was only prompted by curiosity in her endeavours to penetrate the seclusion of their homes, and probably thought that the kindly interest displayed would not last. She was discouraged, being too sensitive to be content to be misunderstood. She began to feel that, for lack of high purpose and useful aim, as well as through the enervating climate, she was beginning to be indolent and incapable of effort.

Above all, there was one thing in which she had been keenly disappointed—a hope, for the fulfilment of which her whole nature throbbed, and which unfulfilled had reacted upon her spirits. Of that which would have pledged their mutual love, and for which she had surrendered herself so entirely, there was no sign. Others had prayed that this longing might be accomplished and their prayers had been heard. But in her case the stimulus of an ardent faith was wanting, and beyond the silent craving of the heart she framed no petition. She felt herself to be no more to the Divine Spirit of the universe than one of the water lilies that bloomed for a brief day in the basin upon the lawn.

Helen, in her loneliness, had been curious to know who lived in the little villa adjoining the grounds of Lotus Hall, and had often watched Kirimanica tending her flowers in the garden. She designedly strolled one day towards the boundary in order to speak to the girl, an advance which was at first very shyly received. In course of time they had become acquainted, and Panabokki's daughter occasionally, when Helen was alone, had visited her through the hedge. She

was delighted with the luxurious interior of the Hall, and its many evidences of cultivated taste. Best of all she liked to hear Helen sing. To the latter the society of the child was a pleasant novelty at first, and, later on, it afforded a decided interest. She learnt to admire the sensitive and gentle nature of Kirimanica, and many an otherwise idle moment was devoted to learning, through the girl, of the ways and habits of thought of her race. She encouraged the latter to ask questions on her part, and some of them were sufficiently embarrassing. Why English ladies danced? and with men other than their husbands? Helen had never given a second thought to such matters. She supposed that all women loved the poetry of motion, and in the dance it found its highest expression. Some husbands could not dance; others did not care for it; and then there were lots of men who had not got wives of their own, so they danced with the wives and daughters of others. It was all right and proper, just a Western custom that only very advanced people in the East had yet adopted. Could she not, the girl once asked, find all her happiness with her husband in this lovely home, she who was so beautiful and full of so many charms? The question had unintentionally so much point that Helen could not answer it, or, at all events, did not choose to explain, but coloured slightly and changed the subject. After Kirimanica had gone she thought of it again. Indeed, it was not for the first time. There must have been some reason, perhaps more than one, for the slight suspicion of coolness which had changed the colour of their lives. But Helen could not at that time define it. She would at

times go to the glass and scrutinise her image, fearful that the beauty which had so attracted George Agnew at Hampstead was paling in the tropical heat. Then she scouted the idea, for others, especially Harold Norton, did not conceal their admiration for it. And she still retained the velvet texture of skin and rounded contour of bust and limbs that added so much to her natural grace. Occasionally she would think that intellectually she was a poor companion for her husband; he, a man of wide attainments, and she of so little cultivation, save in music and in the scraps of other arts she had acquired by desultory reading and from the society that met at Heath Lodge. Perhaps it was that she was not demonstrative enough to one who, cold in his own nature, expected spontaneity in others. So she would double her caresses and strive to sit upon his knee, yet feeling often that a full response was not forthcoming. The slight chill she experienced caused her to throw herself more energetically than before into the frivolities of the social circle in which they lived, and to find relief in mere amusement. At times the fervour of her husband's first love seemed to return, and she found it ineffably sweet to be clasped to his breast, and to feel his kisses upon her eyes, her brow, and her lips. The man's disposition was always a matter of surprise to her, for she knew nothing of the ebb and flow of passion.

It was certainly a pleasure to have Harold Norton to turn to in her hours of *ennui*. He was always devoted to her service. Sometimes, when at Lotus Hall, she fancied that her husband disliked Norton, and that his presence was un-

welcome. Yet again, Agnew was often most cordial to his guest, and had evidently cast off suspicion of mistrust. If he felt it, he was too proud to show it.

Norton and Helen were much alone together. She had few lady friends. Their tea-parties did not interest her, and the current gossip of the town palled upon her, coloured and exaggerated as it often was. The intimacy which had become so marked had not escaped observation by some who had never known temptation, and who really rather envied Mrs Agnew her opportunities. Much to his annoyance, her husband one day heard it referred to in conversation by some business men in an office in the Fort. He was cold to her in consequence, but would not vouchsafe to interrogate or to admonish her. She might be careless and unthinking, but he had no doubt of the implicit devotion of the girl he had stooped to choose. He saw it in her look of admiration for him, and in the readiness with which she hastened to his side and pressed her cheek to his when she thought her presence would be acceptable. Agnew himself might, if he had possessed the leisure, have done much to promote the education of his young wife, which was commencing only when they married. But wearied as he was from the exacting nature of his business, after his long day in office, he found little inclination to make the effort. He made the common mistake of supposing that she would continue it upon her own initiative, and without the frequent praise and encouragement women so much need. She herself saw numbers who did no better than she did, and with whom amusement

appeared to be the object of life. The earnest purpose which had been the ruling feature of the lives of the men and women who lived in their social circle in London seemed here to be absent.

Dancing was delightful, and in Colombo, at this time, there was plenty of it. The two exceptionally good balls of the season—that of the Governor, and at the Club—commanded everyone's presence. Excellent floors, lavish entertainment, and the numerous contrivances for *tête-à-têtes* promoted the 'flow of soul' which in prosaic daily life is mostly wanting. Agnew liked his wife to go to these things. She was so much admired in her transcendent beauty, that it gratified him to see it, and she seemed always to enjoy herself. Sometimes he would dutifully remain to the end. Occasionally she returned alone, or perhaps in company with another lady.

The evening of the Turf Club Ball was a charming one. A strong wind blew and caused the foamy waves to break fiercely upon the beach, while a bright moon silvered their curling crests. Women, in their new and handsome dresses, looked their brightest and best; the jaded looks of early morn having disappeared with the excitement of the dance and a *soupçon* of champagne. Cards had been rapidly filled, and when in the crowd, an hour or two after their arrival, her husband found Helen, he discovered that she was likely to remain until the early hours. He said,—

'Enjoy yourself, my dear child; but I am afraid I must be off. I shall be fit for nothing next day if I sit up longer. Here is Mrs Airlie,

who goes your way, who will, I am sure, drive home with you.'

It was a cloud upon the girl's enjoyment to be thus left alone and unprotected, and she said in a moment,—

'George, dear, we will make a bargain. If you will wait for me, I will be ready to go at twelve o'clock. There, will that do?'

'No. I insist upon your keeping all your engagements.'

Mrs Airlie, who was standing near at hand, turned, and remarked at the same moment,—

'Oh, yes; we are both alone, and I will see Mrs Agnew to her door with pleasure.'

She was a lively little brunette, who was left much to her own devices, having made herself largely independent of her husband, and considerably of public opinion. She had a particular friend herself, and conceived a fellow-feeling for Helen in regard to the attachment of Harold Norton, which she thought she had detected. She believed that everybody had a special friend, and it was only fear of remark that made some women disinclined to admit the fact.

'I am sorry,' she said, 'that we have had, Mrs Agnew, so few opportunities of meeting one another. I should like to know more of you. I think, in our tastes, we might find some agreement.'

She smiled faintly, not certain whether her advances would be well received, or whether, as she often experienced, they would be coldly repulsed. Helen was, however, a stranger to the petty feeling of moral superiority to others that seems often to exist, and replied frankly,—

'I hope you will come and see me—us, I should say—whenever you are inclined. I shall be glad, for I am often lonely.'

'I hear you are musical, Mrs Agnew, and paint, so that we shall have common interests. There are few in whose lives Art has any place. Here is Mr Gray, let me introduce him. He has lately had a serious accident, but is recovering, and allowed out for an hour this evening.'

Gray bowed to Mrs Agnew, and received a kind look of sympathy. She inquired about the accident, and was interested in learning that it had happened near Lotus Hall, and how the Panabokki family had rendered assistance.

'You must have seen my little friend then, Mr Gray,' said Helen; 'a nice child, who comes to see me sometimes from next door.'

'I did, indeed,' the young man replied. 'She is charming in appearance, but more than that I do not know. If you like her, that alone is a recommendation. I must go and see them to express my thanks. Perhaps you can help me in this matter. The Singhalese are rather exclusive to strangers.'

'I am afraid I cannot help you much, as I am unacquainted with the girl's parents. You must call yourself. I think the girl is rather shy about seeing strangers, especially men, but you might by chance see her in my house on a Saturday, if you were to come in before four o'clock.'

'Very well,' Gray said, 'we will leave it to chance, but I will of course pay my visit to the family.'

Norton came up and claimed Mrs Agnew for a dance, which ended the conversation. They

were seated, afterwards, in one of the alcoves, gracefully constructed of palms and ferns, and dimly lighted by glow lamps for the delectation of those inclined to be tender. In the next one were Mrs Airlie and her partner. Helen did not quite like the familiarities that the lady permitted. She noticed that her fiiend placed his hand upon her arm and kept it there, unrepulsed, and that he was allowed to arrange Mrs Airlie's hair where it had become loosened. Norton remarked,—

'I see you are noticing Mrs Airlie. She is a regular little flirt, but does no harm. She can take excellent care of herself. Her husband leaves her too much to her own devices. Women here say the most cutting things about her, which no men, however, endorse. If she is left alone to do as she likes, her husband must thank himself for the consequences.'

'Even then,' Mr Norton, 'I think self-respect ought to be the rule. To lend colour to annoying rumour is often a woman's fault. The fact of having a husband's confidence, and to have his name to guard, ought to make one careful.'

'It seems to me to be absurd that, out of deference to mere conventionality, one is to have no pleasant friendships with women. I think you all defer a great deal too much to what is called "public opinion"—generally the opinion of a few who are jealous in these matters of those who are favourites.'

'Well,' said Helen, laughing, 'I fear you will not find many who care to brave it. In the first place, things are made unpleasant for a woman who is in Coventry. She is frowned down, or looked at superciliously, in public places. You

forget also that husbands do not always relish the remarks that are bandied about in regard to wives, and that there are apt to be discussions in the privacy of the home which most of us would rather avoid.'

'I am sure, Mrs Agnew, you can be discreet and yet hold your intimate friends. Your tact enables you to keep everything concealed which you wish to do.'

'Indeed, I have nothing to conceal.'

'Surely your feeling for a particular friend, the confidences he gives you, and the privileges you allow him, are not to be matters for public scrutiny, and—I repeat the word—are, as a rule, "concealed"?'

She hesitated a moment, and replied,—

'Perhaps, yes, there are some things one does not outwardly betray,' but she avoided meeting his eyes, which had been turned upon her with evident meaning. She sometimes felt angry with herself that Harold Norton had so large a share of her thoughts; but yet he was always doing little services for her, so that when he claimed her time and company she would seem churlish to refuse him. Helen rose, smiling gently upon her partner, and said,—

'It is very late, and some of the company are getting boisterous. I think I should like to go, if you can find Mrs Airlie.'

'I had hoped to have had another dance with you, Mrs Agnew; just one—a pleasure to me which I cannot express.'

'Really, you are too extravagant. No, I do not care to stay later; it is "form" to go before the place becomes noisy.'

On their way to the staircase they met with the lady they were seeking. She remarked,—

'I am ready for you. I was in waiting to intercept you. Would you mind my friend coming with us in the carriage?' indicating the gentleman whom Helen had observed in the alcove; 'he lives in our direction.'

Helen could not, as he had overheard the inquiry, dissent without appearing discourteous, so of necessity acquiesced. Before they drove away a sketching party had been arranged, at Mrs Airlie's instance, to go down the coast at an early date, the two gentlemen with whom they had last been speaking to accompany them. It would be such fun, and there would be a nice quartette.

As Helen alighted at Lotus Hall, and Mrs Airlie drove off in the barouche with her friend, she could not help feeling that she had rather been made use of by the little brunette, and was herself unguardedly aiding in something her own husband would not like.

An old servant was faithfully awaiting her arrival at the front door, and closed it as she passed in. The master had gone to rest, she learned, and she found his room closed, from which she gathered that he did not want to be disturbed. She passed to her own dressing-chamber, adjoining the fernery at the south end, where her Singhalese waiting-maid, after turning up the lights, stood silent like a statue, ready to assist in disrobing her mistress. She spoke kindly to the girl during the short toilette, and when her hair had been brushed and arranged for the night, dismissed her, bidding her sleep well and long.

Helen herself, late as it was, did not feel like going to rest. The reaction from the excitement of the ball had made her dispirited. Generally, when her husband's return home had preceded hers, he had either sat up to receive her, or managed to awake to give her a welcome. She missed that to-night. She drew up the blind, and, seating herself at the window, looked out upon the silent night. A toad was hoarsely croaking in the fernery, and in the distance a jackal raised a dismal howl. The wind soughed through the funereal foliage of the casuarinas that bordered the road by the sea, and the eternal thunder of the waves rung out upon the beach. It was an hour for meditation, a time when physical vitality ebbs low, and, with Helen, there seemed to be, in these particular features of the night, something of a foreboding, some nameless dread that agitated her. The thought which was so often present was of the waning of her husband's love. If she were to judge by the absence now of the frequent caresses she enjoyed as a bride, and of that welcome smile that used to light her husband's face at her approach, then she was obliged to confess that, tormenting as it was, the horrible suspicion was suggested by facts. If the horizon of her married life had darkened thus soon, what of the future when the sky would be always overcast, when sympathy between them might fade entirely away? What of that other who she knew loved her? The tears welled up and rolled slowly down her cheeks. She leaned upon the window-sill, and sat for some minutes with her handkerchief to her eyes. The light in her room, to anyone outside the house, threw her figure into

relief. She was almost frightened, certainly startled, by a voice close at hand, in soft tones, saying,—

'Lady!'

Looking in the direction from which it proceeded, she saw a graceful form robed in white muslin. It was Kirimanica. She had risen at night, disturbed by the bright moonbeams that found their way into her chamber, and while looking through the window had observed Helen's attitude of grief. Her simple heart was deeply touched, and, hesitating for a moment, fearing her parents' displeasure, and the possibility of reptiles in the grass, had tripped across, plucking, as she crossed her garden, a lily, which she placed in front of Helen as she spoke.

The girl's face was turned so that the lamp-light fell upon it. The expression of the dark eyes, slightly moist with tears of sympathy, of the parted lips, and the significance of the little offering, were irresistible, and Helen, dropping her handkerchief, took her little friend's face in her two hands, stooped over the window-sill, and kissed her warmly several times on cheeks and lips. It was an unusual greeting to the Singhalese maiden, but her heart throbbed in response, and she seized Helen's hand in her own two, and, carrying it to her lips, pressed it long.

'Sweet soul,' said Helen, 'you should not be out at this time. You may be in danger.'

'That is nothing, lady; your kindness is always treasured in my heart, and to see you, as I thought, in grief, and alone, pains me in a way I have never felt. It is the night that often brings sadness, and the morning sun drives away the evil spirits who

would make us doubt. See the lilies bloom untroubled even in these dark, silent hours. It must be a good spirit who takes care of the innocent flowers. May it protect you, kind lady. I must go. Good-night.'

The girl bent and kissed again the fair hand, with skin like satin, and Helen murmured,—

'Good-night, dear, dear child. May Heaven bless you!' She watched the slender white figure stealing swiftly across the lawn and through the gap in the hedge through which she had come, until out of sight, when she drew down her own blind, and threw herself wearily upon a couch, with the lily fastened in her bosom.

CHAPTER VIII

It was a bright Sunday morning when the reverend directress of Santa Maria Convent set out with the school children to the service at St Lucia's. They were so many in number that several bullock coaches were required to transport them, and some of the convent sisters accompanied the party as escort. It was quite an event for most of them, for except to occasional parties at friends' houses, and on such festivals as Buddha's birthday, the children did not go far from their own homes. So they were all in great spirits, which had to be subdued by the nuns, who were alive to the solemnity of the occasion. Kirimanica, being one of the elder pupils, was, with one other, permitted in the open phaeton with the directress. Her companion chatted away in a girlish strain to Kirimanica about every little incident of the route through the varied scenes which Colombo furnishes, but the childhood of the latter had lately seemed to leave her—her life had entered upon a new phase, and nothing in her now seemed to respond to the effusiveness characteristic of the schoolgirl. So she said little during the drive, but was in thought anticipating much.

She had longed to have the opportunity that presented itself this day of learning what kind of religious faith it was which the English professed, which allowed so much individual freedom, even

surprising latitude, she had often thought, and yet had helped to build up the British nation, and had impressed itself upon its institutions. If the Christian faith had, as she supposed it had, given to Mrs Agnew her grace of manner and her refined susceptibilities, and to Mr Charles Gray his frank and manly ways, his brave temper of mind, and his courteousness, there must be something wonderful in it. Yet, again, it was a subject upon which Mrs Agnew had never touched in their conversations, and it was observed that she never went to church. If it were so precious a heritage, how strange that it was not more openly manifested—a thing one would have supposed to be cherished above all others, and to bear upon everybody's life. Here was a puzzle which could not at present be unravelled.

When they all alighted and entered the spacious cathedral the childish anticipations of most of the party turned to mute astonishment. The fine aisles and transepts crowded with worshippers, the gorgeous altar decked with flowers, golden candlesticks and silk brocade, with the mystic Cross in the centre, the coloured windows and decorated side chapels, appealed at once to those of a race by which sensuousness in ceremonial has always been cultivated.

With the rest of the assembly they all rose as the priests and choristers passed in procession round the church, the harmony of voices and the mighty organ striking chords in hearts ready tuned for such melody but never yet so touched.

Kirimanica felt her nature thrilled in a way she had never before experienced. Something within responded to these heaven-sent strains. She could

not tell what, only she seemed to want to cry: and yet it was not from feeling unhappy. A silent thirst appeared to be suddenly assuaged, or the curtain had been lifted which had to her until then shut out the divine light from an unrevealed world. To such music as this she thought the spheres of heaven must roll through space, and in response to which the palms must wave their glistening fronds, and the flowers she loved so much rear their tender petals.

To her disappointment the service was in a language she knew not, but the music and the tones of the worshippers helped her to understand the nature of their devotions. Of Jesus she had often heard. He had given his life to teach mankind. He had left all to offer himself a sacrifice. So had the Lord Buddha. She could kneel to either. She could pray like the rest for salvation. Carried away by the earnestness of the crowd she united with them, if not in speech, in soul, in the effort to approach the throne of grace, to put themselves in communion with the spirit of life and light. Every now and then hysteric sobs would rise and with difficulty were suppressed. Something seemed to choke her, and tears, which she would fain have withheld, she was forced to wipe away.

The directress noticed her distressed condition and kindly pressed her hand, but the show of sympathy only brought fresh tears to the girl's eyes. She clenched her hands, striving to be calm, when the exquisite music again thrilled through every fibre and overpowered her attempts at restraint. For some minutes she buried her eyes in her handkerchief as they all knelt in prayer, and the

recollection of that night at Lotus Hall flashed through her mind. One was then in grief and shed tears because all was dark; those were tears of sorrow. Her own now came she knew not why, but they seemed to be tears of joy for the uprising of a great light.

This day, in the cathedral, the Vicar Apostolic preached to children, and, Kirimanica was delighted to find, in English, and in language of which they could easily grasp the sense. The sermon was of 'Jesus, the Son of God,' the fount of true sympathy with mankind and the essence of true self-sacrifice by which He was to reunite a degenerate race with the Almighty Creator. The sinless life of the Son of Man; His compassion for human suffering, His tenderness for the young; His own complete self-forgetfulness; that wonderful and mystic death upon the cross for the redemption of mankind; the resurrection and ascension; the growth of His Church on earth; and the missions of the Apostles—all these facts came to many of the little hearers in the light of new revelation. The Lord Buddha had given up a kingdom; had led the life of a mendicant; had taught them to be kind to all; to speak the truth; to wish for nothing for self; to inflict no pain; to separate themselves from human passion; and, for a final reward, they would become insensible to human feelings and be translated to a region of unbroken repose dissociated from all former relationships.

But the religion of Jesus Christ was one in which their existing associations were spiritualised. Those whom they loved here they were to love still better, but in a higher and a better sense; and

their happiness in the new heavens, to which he had procured for them entrance, was to consist in the communion with the souls of the loved ones who had gone before through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Their existing pursuits and social relations were sanctioned by Him when entered upon in the spirit He taught. If they saw in Jesus the highest expression of the principle of self-sacrifice which existed throughout nature, the Redeemer who had made good all their deficiencies, and believed in His Divine Mission, then through Him they would upon earth already commence that eternal life for which even the most infirm and ignorant had an innate longing. More than this, Jesus lives, and the love for humanity which He displayed upon earth dies not. He listens to the prayers of the most humble, and when 'other helpers fail' and the comfortless here have none to turn to it is in Him that they find rest for their souls.

Jesus Christ had brought men near to God, our Heavenly Father, and into communion with Him. The preacher knew of no other prophet or religious teacher who had effected this. Moral injunctions there had been, and excellent they were in their tendency; but of the sense of reconciliation and of the certainty of forgiveness for the repentant he knew not, save in the faith of Christ. He exhorted the little ones of the Church in that large assembly to preserve throughout life that childlike faith with which they had been endowed, and those who knew not the truth to pray God to instil it in their hearts and to determine at all hazards to grasp it for ever when found.

Kirimanica had drunk in every word of the dis-

course, spoken with the emphasis which betokens the sincere belief of the speaker in his own sentiments. She had never, although she was not a stranger to the Bible, heard such words before nor sat in company with a thousand others to listen to so eloquent a Christian teacher. She seemed to have something more tangible than she had ever realised to live and to work for. What she had tried to practise according to the light of Buddhism would not, she thought, have been unacceptable to Christ, but that day she felt that it had not been of her own ability. The power of Christ had, it would seem, been manifested through the medium of another faith, in which it had been in a sense obscured. A thick mist appeared suddenly to have been lifted. The will of God had been manifested and human action was in all respects to be subordinated to that. Weakness in resolve was not now to be left unaided, for 'in Christ all are made alive.'

These were the ideas that passed through the girl's mind, not immediately in logical sequence, nor exactly formulated, but by degrees, to furnish her reasons for her new faith.

The directress scanned her closely as they drove home, and gathered satisfaction in thinking that for one, at least, the divine service of that morning had not been without fruit.

The noonday sun was lighting all the landscape and the restless billows with a wealth of radiance, which seemed to Kirimanica typical of the eternal glory in Christ which that morning had been depicted. She could look back in subsequent years to this day as the one upon which she had entered

upon a rest which nothing could disturb, where her loves had become hallowed, her sympathies widened, and her aspect of life changed.

Returning by the sea front, they passed other carriages coming from the Fort Church. Two gentlemen were in one. He who was on her side evidently recognised her. It was Gray, who bowed and lifted his hat, while he coloured, probably feeling the strangeness of the *rencontre*, and sensible of the chaff to which he would be subject from those who were ignorant of the reason of his acquaintance with one of a group of Singhalese schoolgirls in charge of nuns. That would not, however, allow him to be discourteous or ungrateful.

Kirimanica had never been thus noticed, but bowed slightly and smiled as she had seen English ladies do, much to the surprise, and a little to the indignation, of the reverend directress, who immediately required explanation. That was given briefly in relation to the events of the memorable evening, and the old lady was well satisfied, and thought it was nice of the gentleman to have remembered the girl. As she parted with the pupils at the convent, she said,—

'Now, children, perhaps we may never attend another service at the cathedral together. What you have learnt to-day, strive to remember, but conceal nothing from your parents. Let their wishes be your law. But if they will let you learn more of the Holy Jesus, come to me to be taught. Go home, now, and may He be your guide. Heaven bless you!'

Kirimanica was obliged, at the mid-day meal, to give a full account of the service, which she did

with so much fervour as to fairly startle her father and mother. The former had rational objections to Christianity, the truth of which he always argued ought to survive the application of scientific tests, just like any other hypothesis put forward for public acceptance. The incarnation, the immaculate conception, and the resurrection, were articles of faith which he could not bring himself to believe, although, if he had taken pains to inquire, he would have found in the natural world unexplained phenomena, implying the operation of yet unknown laws, which would have made him hesitate to reject analogous facts connected with revealed religion. But he had become habituated to believe only what could be proved, so that even the miracles connected with Buddhism be rejected. He had been brought up in this faith, however, and its moral precepts recommended it to him as good, so he held to it. His wife was a simple person who was content with the religion in which her ancestors had lived and died, although it had never been the comfort to her she could wish, especially, she remembered, when the baby boy she loved so much had faded away in her arms, and the little soul had gone whither she knew not. To-day, then, after a lengthy recapitulation of the service, and of the sermon of the Vicar Apostolic, the girl did not receive much sympathy, and her father even looked cross. She retired, when she could, to her room, to think it all over again. It was now a trouble to her that her parents could not see as she did. She was prompted to ask in prayer that this might be so. Some time or other, for Christ's sake, that prayer would be answered. So she had been told that morning. This thought gave more

elasticity to her feelings. She felt less disappointed.

A casket stood on a little table at which she was wont to sit at her lessons. She opened it, and took out the handkerchief which had covered the flowers that went to the hospital. It had a new interest for her. The faith of which she had learnt so much to-day was his too.

CHAPTER IX

THE race week was past, and society in Colombo, recovering from the lassitude and indigestion attendant upon the surfeit of luxuries and late hours, was again at liberty to resume its wonted ways. On a Saturday afternoon Kirimanica had been asked to come over and sit with Mrs Agnew in her boudoir. The latter was painting a portrait of the girl to send to Heath Lodge as a souvenir of Ceylon. Caselli would value it, Helen knew, both for the sake of his daughter and for the interest he took in her new life. Dear father! How she longed to see him, to comfort him in his loneliness—the one companion of her past life that she sorely missed. Here, apart from her husband, who was so abstracted and unable to afford her anything but scant time, she had no one in whom she felt she could confide. How different life would be were the one true friend at hand. She pictured him often alone and bereft of his child's society, growing perhaps worn and perceptibly ageing, sitting under the cedars, or walking over the heath, uncheered by her presence. He never referred in his letters to this aspect of his life, but always seemed to strive to contribute to her happiness, and to look hopefully forward to their early meeting. He had promised himself to visit them, but up to now his brush had been so busy as to prevent it. So she wrote often, and never alluded to the clouds

that had gathered over the sky of her married life, but set herself to brighten that of her loved parent as much as she could. In this picture she took a special delight, both from the fact that it would please him and in that the subject was one of Singhala's best and most charming maids.

The child was taken sitting under palms, bent over some needlework, and attired in a bodice of embroidered white silk, exposing her well-formed neck and shoulders, and part of her slightly-swelling bosom ; a red silk wrapper clothed her from waist downwards, and from underneath, her little feet, always bare, in the primitive fashion of the country, peeped forth. The black hair was smoothed back, knotted behind, and secured with a jewelled pin ; a few white flowers were wreathed around it, and on each cheek, in front of the ear, a whisp of hair was turned up, and lay flat upon the skin in a little curl, giving a certain piquancy to the thoughtful face. The lips, slightly parted, revealed her even and pearly teeth.

She had sat some dozen times to Helen, and the picture was approaching completion. The parents had been made cognisant of what was being done, and had been reluctant to permit it ; but on receiving Mrs Agnew's promise that the portrait would not be exhibited in Colombo, they yielded consent. It was to be sent over for their inspection when finished.

It had been a pleasure to Helen to have the girl's company. Her heart had been won by Kirimanica on the night of the ball, when the latter had come to comfort her in her sorrow. The freshness and innocence of the girl's ideas

and the *naïveté* of her conversation brought a charm to their society which the commonplace of Colombo life ever wanted. To-day, the talk was largely of the memorable service at the cathedral which had so impressed the girl and had marked a new epoch in her life. She was disappointed to find that Helen lacked the enthusiasm which she had expected in one brought up in a land where all were, nominally at least, of the Christian faith. She asked,—

'Do you not believe this truth which they preach in your churches?'

'I know what it is, and I think the creed is a lovely one; but I do not feel its force. Perhaps it is my bringing up. Perhaps I see that so few who profess to worship practise what they pretend to accept. I seem to have grown to think that all nature, including that of ourselves, moves onward in compliance with irresistible forces, which there is no earthly will to combat; that we atoms are floating down a great stream which bears us, whether we would or no, to the great ocean of eternity, to be shaped, it may be, in new forms, but of which we know nothing.'

'And where is comfort in time of sorrow? Where help in weakness? Where forgiveness for our sins? It seems to me, now that I have learnt to pray, I rise up with a great strength, and when I would do wrong there is a sign to point to me the way of right. Jesus lives, they say, but if that be not true my new hopes are but naught. Oh, lady, cannot you help a poor, ignorant girl, who knows nothing of your great world, nor even what life awaits her in her little sphere?'

She had dropped her work upon her lap, and

Helen could see, as she looked up plaintively, tears standing in her expressive eyes.

'You,' Kirimanica continued, 'who can teach me so much, who know everything, in mercy help me, and tell me is it but a fable which has wrung my heart and put a new spirit into my whole being? I can speak to you. I love you. I adore your beauty and your good heart. It cannot be that you, of all, should be the one to snatch from me the priceless jewel I thought to possess.'

The unhappy child buried her face in her handkerchief and sobbed.

Helen, deeply moved, turned to the window to hide her own emotion. That mysterious influence which was to be exercised by the one over the other in human society, the right and good one which alone could bind its varied constituents in healthy form—was it in her case entirely lacking? If she possessed it, how had it been used? She felt humiliated, pained, and grieved for the misery of her little companion. She laid down brushes and palette, and going up to Kirimanica, rested her fair hand upon her raven hair and said,—

'Dear child, for you are no more, I cannot teach you in this.' She nearly added, 'You shall teach me,' but pride restrained her. 'It is possible that you have found the truth. Hold to it. Some of us have not. Not yet. Be happy that you have its comfort. When I know more we will talk together again. I am sorry that I fail you most when really wanted. You comforted me one night, and I would fain make you happy in your belief. Keep it safe as you would a jewel, and you

shall come often to tell me all you think and do. Be cheered.'

Helen helped to dry the tears that still wetted the long lashes, and restored the girl to something like composure. She also skilfully changed the subject.

'I want more light here, too,' she observed, going to the further window to raise the blind to permit the brilliant colouring of her subject to be rendered more vivid. She was charming. The recent train of thought and consequent emotion had invested her countenance and pose with a pensiveness that accentuated her peculiar beauty with an element with which, in the East, it seems to find its highest expression. While she wore it, Helen managed, with a few skilful touches, to fix it upon the canvas.

A servant at this moment announced that a gentleman had called, and presented his card upon a salver. It bore the inscription,—

MR CHARLES GRAY,
Ceylon Civil Service.

Helen remembered her words to him at the Turf Club Ball. It was not the best occasion on which to display her little companion, but she must make the best of it.

'Kirimanica, a gentleman has come. I must stop painting. Put on your happy smile, because I want you to-day to come into the drawing-room.'

The girl looked distressed, and replied,—

'I cannot. My parents do not wish me to meet strange gentlemen, and to-day I do not feel I can

be with you longer. My heart is sad and words fail me. Let me, if you please, dear lady, withdraw.'

'It will gratify me if you will come, even for a few minutes. The gentleman is not a stranger. It is Mr Gray.'

Kirimanica started, almost quivered, and Mrs Agnew, looking at her in surprise and with intense curiosity, saw the unwonted red flush showing through her tawny skin. She took the girl's hand and drew her, somewhat hesitating, through the hall to the door of the drawing-room. Still leading her, she bowed as she entered, and smiling gaily, said,—

'Good afternoon, Mr Gray. You have come just in time to find an old friend. The young lady was difficult to persuade to see you, but here she is to speak for herself.'

Kirimanica's embarrassment was almost painful, but Gray, observing it, pretended to be blind to it. He shook hands with her after Mrs Agnew, and said,—

'I am pleased, very, to meet you once more. I was afraid it would not be, and that I should not be able to show you that I had not forgotten your kind care and help. You see I have not, and, I hope, never shall. I called but a few days ago to express my thanks, but saw nobody, and I understand that you do not receive English visitors. But now I am happy that I am not treated as quite a stranger.'

Her eyes, until then cast down, were raised at this pause to his; and he looked so brave, and fair, and handsome, and his own eyes so kind, that he appeared like Mrs Agnew's brother. She

smiled back and felt at ease. He knew that she would not talk much if addressed directly, so he turned to Mrs Agnew, and engaged in converse about social matters in Colombo—the races, the balls, the tennis tournaments, the matrimonial announcements, and so forth.

'My leave is shortly up, and I have to return to Matila. I shall sigh for all I leave behind in Colombo.'

The girl interposed.

'I am glad you will be at Matila. I shall hear something of you. My uncle is Ratemahatmya of Matila.'

He turned to her, pleased to find a topic of conversation, and remarked,—

'Indeed, Welletenya; I know him well, and a fine old fellow he is; a remarkable specimen of the Kandyan chief. His son is of the same cut as his father, although a bit wilful and headstrong. And do you ever come to his place?'

'I have spent many years of my childhood at my uncle's place, the "Mahaganga Waláwa" as they call it; they were happy years, before I went to school. My father then practised in Kandy, and now occupies himself at the Supreme Court.'

'I hope, young lady, we shall meet, and you may depend that I shall ask the Ratemahatmya to let me see you, should you be at the Waláwa. It is only two miles from my house, and I can see its red roof on the slope of the hill among the old trees, across the valley which separates us.'

Her face lit up with unusual animation, quite innocently and unguardedly, and Gray viewed her with peculiar curiosity. Her beauty was so remarkable, and her grace and elegance differentiated her

so strikingly from many of the native girls he had seen, that he might be excused for admiring her even as a complete stranger; but the circumstances under which he had first met her had put her in a romantic position, and suggested possibilities which in other cases might never have come to mind.

'Kirimanica is sitting to me for her portrait,' observed Mrs Agnew, 'and it is so successful that it is going to London under the title of "One of Singhala's Brightest and Best." I am not to show it here, but if you ever go to Heath Lodge you will see it there. It is for my father.'

'Indeed, you could not have a better subject. But I shall be sorry if I am not privileged to see it before it leaves. May I not, Miss Panabokki?'

She laughed at being thus addressed; it sounded so strange. She supposed English custom required it. She shook her head, and answered,—

'I cannot say "Yes," for it is not mine, and my father would say "No" if I asked him. What does the lady say?'

'I think,' said Mrs Agnew, 'Mr Gray must help to pack it, and then he will have the opportunity he wants.'

So they went gaily to tea, and Kirimanica felt that she was really enjoying herself. While the two others were talking, she looked sometimes covertly at Gray, scanning his features and studying his varied expressions, to search out, as it were, his real character. He seemed to attempt to conceal no thought, and in that respect was different from those of her own race. He also, while he spoke, looked straight at the eyes of the person addressed. That was better, she thought,

than the averted glance common in her country, by which the real meaning of what was said was veiled. A smile begotten of honesty, kindness and good temper always lighted up his face, which encouraged the confidence of the timid. The fair hair and moustache, the blue eyes, the fresh complexion, the tall stature and the fine physique, combined to make him a worthy representative of the manly people of the North, and the impression he had made that evening, when he lay stricken upon the couch, gained fresh force to-day when the girl could talk to him and observe his attractions to the full. She had never before spoken freely, and, except under the guardianship of her parents, to an Englishman, nor perhaps ever to one like him, and her susceptible nature was captivated. Against possible dangers of this sort she had never been warned, and had no means by which to resist them. She was, in fact, in a state of passive receptivity, and secretly nurtured, in her inexperience, the awakening of her susceptibilities in this new phase of her life, asking herself no question as to where her affections were being led, or, in the end, where she might be stranded.

Gray thought then that Kirimanica was a nice little girl, and he remembered her affectionately for the solicitude displayed at the time of his accident. He was mindful of the incident of the flowers, too. She was so beautiful that no one—certainly not one in the ardour of youth—could refrain from looking at her as often as there was a pretext. To-day he had, moreover, come to Lotus Hall to satisfy both his curiosity and to make better acquaintance with the girl. He had landed

in Ceylon but a few years before, and with little knowledge of native life and character, ignorant, he would have been ready to confess, that good breeding, education and refinement, such as they would be in England, even existed among the Singhalese; and up to now he had been but very partially made acquainted with the fact, so little had his section of society, exclusively European, had to do with that of natives and of persons of mixed birth. His recent adventure had come to enlighten him, and this afternoon the innate prejudice of his race against everything Oriental had been unexpectedly diminished. He could not deny that he was pleased to find that the outward beauty of the girl pictured her inwardly refined and simple nature, and that her disposition was as fine as that of his own sister. He was a little amused at the undisguised admiration revealed in her gaze at him, but attributed it to childish inexperience and to her unwonted position.

Mrs Agnew had watched the scene with quiet amusement, and indulged her propensity for romance in weaving in her mind a little drama, in which these two were to be the principal characters. She had herself no prejudice against mere colour, and she found herself actually hoping that these two, types of the best among their own people, might some day throw over what they possessed of it to bring about the natural sequel to the eventful occasion of their first meeting. However, this was a mere hope of her own.

It was the time for the evening drive, or for croquet at the Ladies' Club, so Gray rose to say good-bye.

'Come again, Mr Gray,' said his hostess; 'you are always welcome here. Regard us as friends, and let us know when you are likely to be in Colombo, that we may endeavour to take you in. You must be lonely, I fear, at Matila.'

Her address was charming, her voice always full of music, and to-day, in a well-fitting, plain, white dress, relieved by a sky-blue ribbon at the throat, her beauty never more striking. Gray felt no surprise that among men she was so universally admired and the common subject of talk. Her happy mode of expressing herself helped to attract him, and he shook hands warmly, saying,—

'A thousand thanks, Mrs Agnew; I shall gratefully remember your kind invitation. It will not be my fault if I do not see you whenever I come to Colombo, and you and your husband will accept my hospitality, will you not, if you pass my way?'

'We shall be delighted; and now say adieu to my little sister, as I call her. Kirimanica,' laughingly, 'you won't forget Mr Gray? I should like you to remain friends, and you must meet here again some day.'

The girl felt some confusion, but extended her hand to the gentleman, who held it in both his own, saying,—

'Yes, *friends*, recollect, however different may be our paths in life.'

Before she could frame a reply, appreciating her embarrassment, and bearing a pretty picture with him in his memory, he was gone.

Kirimanica tripped across the lawn, Mrs Agnew watching the retreating figure from the drawing-

room window, humming to herself the lines of a favourite song—

> 'Smile on, sweet eyes, although the pathway darken,
> Pray on, O heart, amid the busy strife.'

The girl had her mind full for days afterwards of this unexpected interview. There was one thing she would have liked to know about the man she so reverenced. Was it the Christian faith which had formed his admirable character and given colour to his fine qualities?

That evening, rather than conceal anything from her father and mother, Kirimanica briefly told them of the incidents of the afternoon. The former was particularly displeased. The *rencontre* with Mr Gray was not in accordance with his idea of the seclusion which should hedge a Singhalese girl of family. The liberty common enough in the West was quite unsuited to and even dangerous for his daughter. How easily, in her inexperience, advantage might be taken of her. At first he was quite heated by these reflections, and said,—

'My daughter, you must go there no more. Your life is cast among us, and you can gain nothing by mixing with people who are our betters and are foreign to our customs.'

The girl's countenance was so sad that her mother, although she rarely gainsaid the decisions of her husband, remarked quietly,—

'The lady of Mr Agnew is kind to the child, and no harm has been done to her. To see the lady alone sometimes can do no ill. She has taught her no evil, and the child is happy with

her. Now that she knows so much she looks for other company than that of her mother, who, although she loves the child, is simple and ignorant. It seems from no fault of hers that she spoke to the gentleman. He, too, seems brave and honourable. Father of my child, let her have this pleasure now and then.'

Panabokki, still ruffled, did not express himself further, which the others took to be a favourable sign, and Kirimanica, drawing her chair near to her mother's, put her arm round the devoted soul and laid her head upon her shoulder,

Upon saying good-night the father kissed her on the forehead, and patted her head, which seemed to show that peace reigned again.

CHAPTER X

One morning Helen came into the dining-room to the early breakfast which it was necessary for her husband, an office man, to take, and went up to him as he sat at table, feeling an old impulse arise. She smoothed his hair with her hand, and stooped to invite a kiss, with the word, 'Dear husband!'

The kiss was exchanged, but his eyes were upon the newspaper, and her endeavour to meet his glance, so that she might better express what she desired to say, was futile. She suppressed a sigh, took her seat at the opposite end of the table, remarking,—

'George, we have arranged a trip to Ambalangoda to-day for sketching—Mrs Airlie and a friend, Mr Norton and myself. I wonder if you could come too, or would it be a bore? I like to have you with me sometimes.'

Norton seemed almost indispensable now, and with difficulty Agnew restrained himself from speaking impatiently.

'I could not indeed, dear wife. What with the Council meeting and my own work I have a long day before me. Go by all means. I would rather it had been with a lady other than Mrs Airlie. She and the friend she has picked up—a financialist or traveller who is visiting Ceylon, and can

amuse himself with her without fear of consequences—are being talked about by everybody. She is scarcely prudent—I hardly like to say it—scarcely discreet. Your own reputation will not be enhanced by the association.'

'I had promised to go, but still, if you think I should not, I will even now make an excuse.' She rose and went to his side, putting her arm round him. 'George, your wish shall be mine.'

'Oh, no,' he said, 'I have nothing to urge against your going. But I think you had better neither seek Mrs Airlie's society nor imitate her example. Good-bye, I must be off. I suppose you will be back by dinner-time.'

He had not looked at her as he left the room, and again she felt stabbed by the apparent neglect. She stood at the window gazing upon the lotus pond, where the flowers reposing upon its placid surface turned their spotless faces to the bright sun, unconcerned for the stormy elements that warred around in human life. In her mind the thought passed, 'I would I could be as these. To be in perpetual peace and undisturbed by the distractions that sometimes seem so hateful and intrusive. And he could help me if he would, but he, the strength, and who should be the guide of my life, fails me.'

As she dressed to fulfil her engagement, a withered lily upon her looking-glass recalled the events of a few nights back. The flower had faded quickly, pressed in the warmth and softness of her fair bosom.

They were to meet at the railway station to go to their destination by train. Helen arrived there a few minutes before time, and, of the party,

observed only Harold Norton. He said, with his customary effusiveness,—

'It is delightful to find that nothing has prevented you from coming. It seems to me that I live now for these little favours.'

'But where,' replied she, 'are the others? I hardly like to go without them, nice as you are, you know. One must think as the world thinks.'

'They will be here immediately, I do not doubt, but anyhow you will not disappoint me. I have few pleasures except in your company, and all arrangements at Ambalangoda have been made in advance. Now, do be kind.'

Helen was much perplexed, and felt quite angry with Mrs Airlie, whom she suspected of another ruse. In fact, the game was only too apparent, but there was little time for reflection. The train was punctual. It was plain that the other two could not now accompany them, even if they wished to do so. So when Norton held open the door of the carriage, which was empty, she jumped in, feeling piqued, and saying inwardly that she could take good care of herself under the circumstances. It was an opportunity her companion had long been anticipating, and the day promised to be for him, at all events, a pleasant one. They had their sketch-books with them, and, containing as they did souvenirs of Continental travel, a good hour was put in while comparing notes and recalling the events connected with the various pictures. Every now and then the glorious outlines of the coast south of Colombo occupied their attention; the wide sweep of beach, fringed with palms and fronted by coral reefs, upon which the waves tempestuously dashed, and, here and there, a little

headland where the rocks outcropped, and under which a number of outrigged fishing-boats found a shelter. The scenery was novel to Helen, and she experienced a childish delight in its varied and romantic features, presented in the vivid colours peculiar to Ceylon, which she had, in her life in Colombo, almost ceased to feel. She seemed to be free of the restraints which, in a woman's routine, often become so irksome, and her present sensations brought new radiance to her blue eyes and an unwonted rose tint to her cheeks.

Norton watched her from the opposite seat and revelled in the beauty she displayed, not only in face but in the perfect moulding of her form. He was not a man who thrust away from him the suggestions that are awakened by such contemplation; he rather encouraged them, and his passion for her throbbed in every pulse.

'You are not sorry that you have come to-day, even alone with me, Helen?' he said.

'No, I am not. But you forget that you have no right to use that name.'

'If you object, I will not, but,' taking her hand, 'one's feelings are not always under command. I spoke, too, as I often think of you.'

'Very well, you must not be naughty again.'

She withdrew her hand and looked serious. He could not help contrasting in mind her refined beauty with that of the Singhalese girl from the Horton Plains who was often his companion at his far-away place under the Peak, and helped to while away the idle hours. After a silence of some minutes Mrs Agnew remarked,—

'I sometimes wish, Mr Norton, that I could regard you as a friend, and a true friend. There

are limitations to that feeling which a woman, married as I am, must set. I should be sorry to seem cool, and to you who are awfully nice, but—may I say it?—you seem to want to go further than a friend should, and then I feel timid and hesitating. Won't you accept, once for all, the position you should occupy? Our friendship will then last, while now it often seems in danger of being wrecked.'

He was about to reply precipitately, but restrained himself, and with an assumed coolness, answered,—

'Let me be with you and name your own terms. You know it is only in your company that I find real pleasure. But if I am to hang round like a mere dog, thankful for any morsel that is thrown to me, I suppose it must be so.'

He looked quite pained, and she impulsively placed her hand on the back of his, as it lay upon his knee, and exclaimed,—

'I have never treated you like that. I have been your companion whenever you sought me, and never showed that I was ungrateful. Perhaps you see me too much. I blame myself for it. Seek distraction with others.'

'If I could, I might; but it is too late. A dominant passion seems to have usurped the place of every other feeling, and I find no means of suppressing it. Surely you know!' He caught both her hands in his, speaking with strange emphasis upon the last words, and strove to look straight into the depths of her bewitching eyes, but she would not respond, and, shaking off his grasp, looked far away into the offing, where a number of tiny fishing-craft were dancing like corks upon the billows.

'Change the subject, please, do; it pains me deeply,' said Helen. 'As you are a gentleman, listen to me.'

He said no more, and the train shortly afterwards drew up at the Ambalangoda station. Everything was arranged completely. There was a carriage to drive if desired, and a boat, with an awning, in which they might drift upon the charming lake, and Norton's servants, sent on ahead, had prepared an elegant tiffin at the Rest House. He had even been to the trouble of procuring magnificent roses from up-country wherewith to decorate the table.

Upon their arrival a telegram from Mrs Airlie was handed to them, which ran,—

'Deeply sorry that we have missed train. Thousand apologies.'

Mrs Agnew was slightly mollified upon reading it, although she believed that there was a purpose behind, and Mr Norton seemed quite content to do without the other two guests.

The table was laid in the verandah, where the spray almost reached them from the waves as they broke upon the rocks. There were no other visitors at the Rest House, and they were able to pass a pleasant hour undisturbed, loitering over tiffin. There was turtle soup (one of the real luxuries of Ceylon), whitebait, truffled turkey, stewed prunes with vanilla ice cream, and delicious cool mangosteens, candied dates from Malta, and nougat of Montelimar, accompanied by a glass or two of Roederer.

It certainly was delightful to be out of Colombo,

oppressive by comparison, even for a day, and to gather fresh life from the cool sea breeze and the stimulating odours of the weed on the rocks. Helen was young, and simple enough to enjoy the tasty refection.

'You are an extravagant creature,' she said, 'to have provided all these nice things. Of all, I like the roses best. They are as fragrant as those we used to love so much at Heath Lodge. I must thank you, Mr Norton, for all your trouble and forethought.'

'For you it is very little to do,' he said, 'and I do not often get the chance. Take it as an earnest of my devotion.'

'You know I was brought up very simply, and it was only when we had friends to dinner or supper that we attempted a banquet like this. My father used to say that the sensuous modes of modern life were incompatible with intellectual refinement, and I think one learns that truth when one puts them to the test.'

'I am afraid that it will not find much acceptance among Colonials, anyhow. Among men, especially, I should say, appetite comes first. Women are by nature more delicate in their tastes, and live on a higher plane than we do. They ought to be brought up on milk and strawberries.'

'A delicate diet, it must be confessed, and extremely romantic, but hardly calculated to make us wear well. We have to do more than live like canaries, who are only expected to sing and look pretty.'

'Well, you will allow that many do not do more than that.'

'Yes, it is sad to think so, but we are debarred from doing much that we might usefully do. I should like to see the natural talents of every woman allowed full play and encouraged to the utmost. If we are insipid and colourless, it is due to the system under which we live. Some of us do not find full scope for our gifts in the domestic circle, and if we try to work outside that, difficulties are put in our way and our intellectual qualities sneered at. Had I remained unmarried I should have sought to succeed in art. The atmosphere of work, both for men and women, is the healthiest to live in; and for all to work, my father was wont to say, is the only means by which any society can be what it should.'

'It is rather too learned a subject for me,' remarked Norton. 'I have been content to find pleasure in women's society apart from their intellectual attainments; perhaps because it amuses. Certainly they are interesting, and then there are always "possibilities," which give piquancy to one's relations with women. With some a man finds there exists affinity, which he cannot describe nor can account for. It is like the compatibility which chemists know to exist between certain elements We cannot always permit its development, and yet it is there, and prompts an intimacy.'

'Dangerous, decidedly,' said Helen, smiling. 'It might account for a great deal, but I fear it will not be accepted by the world as a reasonable guide for conduct; and now, if you have had enough wine, shall we go to our sketching?'

They took boat and glided for a mile or two upon the placid lake, to a point where the distant hills formed a dreamy background to the exquisite

vista. Easels and sketching-blocks were produced, and, seated under a banyan tree, they were soon engrossed in their occupation. Some hours passed by heedlessly, for the charm of her work made Helen regardless of time, and her companion was too happy in her society to think of it. The hues were changing, and a purple tint overspreading the mountains as the sun declined in the west, where a bank of thick clouds had formed.

She suddenly recollected herself, and exclaimed,—

'Oh, Mr Norton, you remember we have to be in Colombo by dinner-time? How about the train? I depend upon you, mind, for delivering your precious charge safely, this evening, at Lotus Hall.'

'By Jove! I am afraid we have run it rather fine. Let us pack up quickly and be off!'

Everything was speedily placed in the boat, and the men urged to pull across the lake as quickly as possible. Mrs Agnew looked anxious. She began to realise that she might be led into a difficult position. What Harold Norton was thinking of he did not divulge. She seemed distressed, and for that he felt sorry. But there was another aspect of the case which he welcomed. He said, however,—

'Do not be disquieted, the men are doing their best; we may catch the train. It is the last one to-night. If we do not, you will have to make yourself comfortable at the Rest House.'

She felt ready to cry, and answered,—

'Please, for heaven's sake, offer them anything to catch the train! Remember how painful it will be for me.'

He did. He was man enough to try to help her, even now, in the difficulty. The sum he

named to the boatmen was large enough to prompt them to put their whole strength into the task, and the boat flew over the calm surface, the foam and spray from the oars and keel glowing a phosphorescent blue, as it were from a million sapphires.

The effort was useless. Within a quarter of a mile of the town they saw the steam of the engine rising in the air and coloured pink by the setting sun, while the whistle announced its departure before even the boat had touched the shore.

'What shall we do?' said Helen, in a broken voice, for she began to foresee the construction that would be put upon her absence. 'Harold, you have said often you cared for me. Now, prove it and help me. Be true to yourself as a gentleman, and my friend!'

'I am helpless. Even if we tried to get a conveyance it would be absurd to think of driving fifty miles to-night by it. Besides, if you are to be suspected, the drive would be worse for you than stopping here.'

'But cannot we have a special train? Anything to get back and avoid stopping here!'

'I will ask, if it will please you. Drive to the Rest House while I make inquiries, and I will come shortly.'

When she left, he half hesitated. Should he carry out her request now that he had her here, and, in any event, would receive all the blame for detaining her—the one he longed for above any in the world? He thrust the thought away. He could not approach her with a falsehood.

After making inquiry at the railway station he made his way to the Rest House, and found Mrs

Agnew impatiently pacing up and down the verandah. She hastened to meet him, saying,—

'Well, have you been successful? Don't say you have not!'

'They can do it for a large sum, but will have to get instructions from Colombo. It is not probable that a special can be here before midnight. The first train in the morning is at seven o'clock, and reaches Colombo at nine. I will do what you wish. It seems to me that the wisest plan is to sleep here and go back by the morning train.'

'I cannot. I am full of apprehension. You do not know my husband as I do. He will regard this detention as a prearranged thing. Put yourself in my place and imagine what I shall have to go through.'

Norton said no more, but called for paper and pen, sat down and wrote a few lines to the station-master regarding provision of a special as soon as possible, despatching the note by a servant. He then coolly ordered dinner, for which there were ample supplies remaining from tiffin.

'Now, Mrs Agnew,' he said, 'be cheerful. We have done our best to retrieve the delay. You would like to retire for a short time, I have no doubt. There is a room ready for you.'

'You have been good to me, and I shall remember it. There is one thing more that I will ask you to do—that is to telegraph to George and explain my absence.'

'Certainly, if you will only smile upon me. While you are at your toilette I will go over to the telegraph office.'

Bad weather was threatening. The sky was overcast, the wind had risen, and was blowing

violently, and the palms were waving about like reeds. The waves beat upon the shore with a sound like thunder, and, now and again, the cries of the boatmen, as they ran in for safety, sounded above the general din. Helen, susceptible to such impressions, gathered fresh alarms from the war of the elements, to her a portent of coming disaster. The distant thunder added gloom to her presentiments. She hurriedly completed her toilette, and was quite glad to find Norton in the dining-room, which was bright with lights, and the table decked again with the fragrant roses.

'I hope your usual spirits have returned,' he remarked, 'and that you are satisfied that we have done all we can in this emergency. It will give me a few more happy hours in your society, which I hope you will not grudge.'

'No, indeed, you *have* been kind! A brother could not have done more. The day has really been a charming one. I am sorry for this *contretemps*, that is all.'

'Oh, it will be all right, depend upon it; but it seems likely to be a bad night. Do not be too sanguine about getting away. If I could, you may be sure I would keep you—always!'

Helen placed her finger to her lips and shook her head merrily.

'That topic is forbidden, and this evening particularly.'

He bit his lips. He was always being reproved, and yet had striven hard to win some favour from her.

They sat down to a tempting little dinner. The rain was falling heavily, and the doors and windows on the sea side of the house were obliged to be

closed. However, within everything looked cosy. The champagne, well iced, was a delicious restoration for low spirits, and after taking a glass, Helen felt more happy about herself, and was sure that Mr Agnew, after all, would be satisfied with her explanations. He had probably, already, after receipt of the telegram, understood the situation. Norton pressed her to take more, but her second glass was her last. He helped himself, however, largely, and said, presently,—

'If you really mean to be off at midnight, how shall we pass the time between now and then? You will sit up, I suppose—or are you going to play propriety and leave me alone? Perhaps you would like to rest?'

'No,' she replied, 'that would be unkind. We will play cards, if there are any to be got, or you shall tell me of your experiences. I am sure you have had many.'

'If you will only listen, I can tell you a great deal. But you must promise to let me talk in my own way to-night for once, and give me a little latitude.'

Norton ordered the servants to clear away and to pack up the things that were to go back to Colombo. The flowers were left upon the table. He selected one of the best, and approaching Helen, said,—

'To-night, wear this one, to please me, and to show that you feel no vexation for my carelessness in leading you into this difficulty.'

She smiled charmingly, and turned her eyes upon him with an expression of tenderness, which he was only too ready to mark.

'I cannot be vexed with you, of all people. I

accept the flower,' fastening it in her bosom. 'I confess this evening, just for one minute, I was a little suspicious of you when you neglected to look at your watch. Well, you only forgot. I will say no more. The consequences will be upon poor me. They have managed to find us some cards. We will play *écarté*.'

They sat for an hour thus employed. A furious storm was raging outside. At times their voices were drowned by the noise. The lightning flashed vividly every few minutes, and the thunder-claps shook the very house. Helen began again to be disquieted, rose from her chair, and peeped through the venetians, but quickly retreated, half frightened by the vehemence of the tempest. The servants had all withdrawn for shelter, the house was shut up all round, and they were alone together.

Helen looked nervously at her watch, and began to feel more embarrassed than she cared for her companion to see. He began,—

'Now, I see you are tired of cards. I will tell you of my "experiences." A year ago I sailed from Old England, after a careless, jolly holiday, fancy free, and pleased with all the world. I had never had any great passion. Always ready for work, and equally ready for play. With no serious purpose, you might say, but, like a thousand other men, turning to women sometimes for mere amusement, sometimes owning to regret for my folly. But on board the ship that brought me out I met one whose like I seem never before to have known —you look conscious—whose presence grew ever to be with me in thought, sleeping or waking, however I might strive to be rid of it; whose lovely face came to be stamped upon my memory,

and the mere touch of whose hand set my pulses wildly beating. She liked my company, and, day by day, the preference she showed strengthened the hope that I might one day win some of her love, although another had already won the flower of it.'

She had flushed like the red rose she was wearing, and upon which her eyes drooped, while her hands were clasped upon her lap. His speech was in the nature of an accusation, and she received it in silence. He saw in this encouragement and walking up to where she sat, exclaimed,—

'Helen, my soul's darling, lift your eyes to mine and tell me that my hope is not a false one.'

Before she could resist his arms were tightly round her, and his lips were pressed a dozen times fervently to hers. She started up, and, with a great effort, freed herself from his embrace and burst into tears, feeling her impotence, and keenly sensible of the indignity to which she had been subjected. She sank again into her chair, and covered her eyes with her handkerchief. Between her sobs she ejaculated,—

'I trusted you and have been deceived. There can be nothing more between us. Leave me, for mercy's sake, or I must go even to face the storm alone.'

Norton almost reeled under the excitement of conflicting feelings. For the moment, with her in his embrace, in the exquisite sweetness of those stolen kisses, he had almost lost control of himself. He thought she would have responded, but was mistaken. He was still breathing hurriedly, and

strode up and down the room, struggling to be calm. He saw that she was deeply distressed, and, his manly instinct reasserting itself, he said,—

'Fear nothing, I will leave you. I have been wrong.'

The door closed, and Norton went out into the night. The storm had passed, but the great waves still dashed upon the beach and threw up sheets of spray. The cool air calmed the fever of his passion, but he was furious with himself. He had chosen a wrong time—had staked all and lost. She was gone from him and would not return. Gone for ever. He cursed himself savagely. He must have paced the beach for hours. At times he would sit down upon the rocks and moodily watch the restless surf. The night sped, and a pale gleam lit up the sky behind the ragged outline of the distant mountains. Birds twittered in the suriga trees. The servants were rising, and the movement of human life was beginning once more.

Norton strolled with assumed carelessness towards the house, and remarked to one of the men,—

'Well, there was no train last night. Did any message arrive about it?'

The servant gave him to understand that the telegraph had been interrupted by the storm of the preceding evening, and that no arrangements could in consequence be made.

He felt guilty, and also sorry. Sorry for the poor girl whom he had designed to trap, now that she had to face alone the blame that really belonged to him. Even the telegram that should have reached Agnew on the preceding evening

had then failed to be transmitted. How should he tell her this?

They knocked gently at the door of the dining-room, and, getting no response, entered. Mrs Agnew was lying fast asleep upon the sofa, worn out with apprehension and grief. A few golden tresses lay across her fair cheek, and her eyelids were heavy from the unwonted tears that flowed in the silent hours of the night. Norton was obliged to speak loudly to rouse her, when she jumped up, blushing in her surprise. He said,—

'The train failed us last night. Your privacy has been respected and you have been left alone as you desired. If you will be ready, we can start for Colombo at seven o'clock.'

She recalled everything, but would not, even by her manner, admit before the servants that their relative positions were changed. No one should know a word of it but her husband. She replied,—

'It is vexatious, but we must make the best of it. I am glad to think that Mr Agnew received my telegram last night.'

Norton did not like, in her present frame of mind, to tell her the truth. The telegram was, in all probability, only now in course of delivery.

On the way back neither spoke. Mrs Agnew was obliged to put up with Norton's presence in the railway carriage, but pretended to occupy herself with a book. At times she burned with indignation against him for the insult he had offered her. Again the fit would pass off and she was half inclined to forgive him. He had only loved too well, and that is acceptable to any woman, however particular she may be. But she would not make any sign that she was relenting.

Her sense of duty to her husband was too strong, however weak and indulgent she might herself be.

Upon arrival at the station, Norton saw her to a conveyance, and said,—

'I have been wrong—mad—wicked! but I deeply regret it. Can I hope to be forgiven?'

She simply replied,—

'Your repentance must be proved before it can be accepted as sincere. Good morning—I should say good-bye.'

The night had been a troubled one for the master of Lotus Hall. The carriage had been to the station to meet the evening train at seven o'clock, but had returned empty. No lady had arrived. No telegram of explanation had followed. Had there been an accident? Surely, if so, news would have been sent to him. Agnew trembled when another alternative presented itself to his mind, and the perspiration stood in beads upon his brow. Could it be, then, that the day's excursion was a blind to get away, that his wife was really gone for good with the one man whom he suspected, and who had been so persistent in his attentions? It was a terrible thought, and as it slowly gained strength he seemed in a few minutes to be passing through the tortures of the damned. Like phantoms of the past, his own misdeeds came one by one to mind, and it was as if he were laid upon a rack of mental agony to expiate each one. Then he recalled the morning of that day, when his wife sought his caresses, which she so much craved for, but of which he was so niggardly, and he condemned himself for neglecting her and casting her into temptation. His wife flown—the only one, the lovely bride to whom he had given his

best and truest love, his honour, and his wealth! It was terrible, too terrible to be real.

He summoned courage to put on an outward calm. He would not have the servants privy to his fears. He seated himself at the dinner-table without a word, and pretended to eat, but he could plainly see that the very domestics who waited upon him wore an air of perplexity and gloom, as if they shared his thoughts.

Later, the head servant ventured to ask if dinner was to be kept ready for his mistress's return, or if the house was to be shut up. Agnew merely replied in the negative, that the lady was detained by friends, and would not perhaps return until next day. That was soon enough, forsooth, for the horrible news to be known and published. The lights were accordingly put out for the most part, but the faithful old servant who had for many years waited upon his master's wishes in all his moods, and held his interests as his own, sat down near the front door to spend the night in waiting for his loved mistress's return. Something had gone wrong, he was sure. The maid had been told to expect Mrs Agnew by dinner-time, and her evening dress was laid out. He had noted his master's agitation. Could there have been an accident this stormy night? Only that, he was certain, would have prevented her coming back.

George Agnew retired to his study and purposely turned his light low, in order that it might be thought that he had gone to rest. But sleep came not, and the raging of the elements outside pictured the inward tempest which seemed to be rending to fragments his very soul. He sank into

an arm-chair, after pacing the room for some hours, and half dozed, until the hoarse cry of the crows, and the toll of a bell for matins, ushered in the dawn.

A servant brought his tea as usual to his study, and was surprised to find his master still undressed. The latter started up, took tea, refreshed himself with a cold bath, ordered his horse, and went for a hard gallop round the racecourse. The cool air and the exercise gave him tone, and he felt better able now to meet the dread ordeal that he was destined, he thought, to pass through. By nine o'clock he was dressed in his usual office clothes, and was sitting at his study table opening his correspondence.

The servants, who were busy at the morning task of setting in order the house, were delighted when a carriage drove up and their mistress alighted. The old butler hastened forward to receive the sketching apparatus and bag that Helen had taken with her, saying,—

'I have waited up for lady all night, frightened that some accident had happened. Master say nothing, but he no sleep.'

'Surely,' said Mrs Agnew, 'the telegram came which I sent from Ambalangoda?'

'No, lady, telegram not come.'

She passed quickly through the passage, knocked, as was her wont, at the study door, for fear of intruding when visitors were present. Her husband's voice bade her come in. Upon entering, Helen saw, from his look, that she had the worst to fear. He had then put a construction upon her absence that perhaps most men would. His cold and silent reception of her rather unnerved her.

She halted on the opposite side of the table at which he sat, saying,—

'George, I was detained at Ambalangoda through no fault of mine last night. We sought to get a special train but failed, and it seems that a telegram explaining matters to you, which was sent in the evening, has not reached you. I am deeply sorry for the anxiety you have suffered. Let me tell you the whole of what has passed. May I sit down here?'

He uttered not a word, and she falteringly drew a low chair near to his and would have rested her arm upon his knee, but he repulsed her. The action sent a spasm through the poor girl such as a mortal stab might produce. She hid her face in her hands, and cried bitterly.

Agnew rose from his chair, put his hands behind him, and walked to and fro, keeping his eyes fixed upon the wealth of blossom in the lotus pond. To him it seemed as if her utterance and manner were influenced by a sense of guilt. And yet she had come straight to him with apparently nothing to conceal.

Helen continued, making an effort to be calm,—

'Listen, and do not misjudge your wife, who holds your honour as her own. Hear all I have to say, for pity's sake!'

She went through, in exact detail, all that had passed during the preceding evening, recapitulating the very words Harold Norton and she had exchanged. Agnew was furious when he learned of the liberty that had been taken with his wife. He felt that he could not have answered for himself had the offender been present. But that she should have put herself in a position where such

a thing was possible, was clearly due, in his mind, to her own folly and imprudence. He did not like to think what else. He was too proud to ask what more. He strove to restrain himself from speaking, in his anger, such words as might be irrevocable, and he succeeded. He still turned his back upon her and gazed out of the window. When she had concluded her account of the night at Ambalangoda, and of the journey back to Colombo, she said timidly,—

'Dearest husband, I have told you all, not concealing a single thing of what has passed. I was wrong to have gone alone with him. I admit it. I have used the liberty you have given me ill. To pain you seems like to break my heart. Tell me that still I have your trust! Say that you know I am true to you! I will prove it, and live for you alone if you will have it so! Speak, I beseech you.'

Agnew turned at last and faced her. It had required a great effort to reply in his usual tones, but there was an iciness in his mode of address which chilled her whole nature.

'You may remain here. I have no objection to offer to that. To silence the vulgar chatter of the outside world it will be better so. But our relations will be different from what they have been. You will be Mrs Agnew still in name, and that name I shall expect you to respect. As for him, if he dares to hold any communication with you, I shall deal with him finally. Leave me, or I may speak too plainly!'

She walked unsteadily to the door, with one hand pressed upon her heart, and holding with the other to any chair or table that offered her support. At the door she turned and exclaimed,—

'Oh, George, have mercy upon me, I implore you, in my desolation! My love is all for you, I swear it, as pure and true as on our marriage day. Is it nothing to you?'

She looked so lovely, with the impassioned look of her violet eyes, from which two tears had started and lay upon her pink cheeks, her blonde hair slightly dishevelled, and surrounding her face, as it were, with a golden radiance; and the tone of her voice was so strangely pathetic that Agnew almost gave way and took her to his heart, but anger and pride prevailed. He made no reply, and she quitted the room, feeling like one banished to outer darkness.

CHAPTER XI

KIRIMANICA had been permitted to pay occasional visits to Mrs Agnew, with the understanding that she was to see no other persons upon these occasions. She had been charged with a message to this effect. The mistress of Lotus Hall had found much interest in the girl. Her sympathy and affection were indisputably sincere, and were acceptable to one who was now so lonely in her own life and found so little of those elements elsewhere. Then her genuine admiration for Mrs Agnew was amusing, and her respect for the omniscience which she supposed that lady to possess was interesting.

The portrait was approaching completion, and, during the sittings, the girl was full of conversation, now that she felt completely at ease in the lady's presence. This often turned upon the Christian faith. She had several times, from memory, recapitulated the sermon heard at St Lucia's. Her own deductions from that, and what she had read in Scripture, had cleared up much that was previously obscure. The emotional aspect of the faith had recommended itself to her simple and innocent nature. She said one day,—

'I often think that you, who ought to be happy with all that you have, are sad, even unhappy. What is the reason?'

'I cannot tell you all I feel, Kirimanica, but happiness consisteth not in the things we possess.'

'Not in things we see and touch, but in things that the spirit knows of. When I feel unhappy I pray in my room, and then a bright light seems to come over everything. It is as if an answer came for Jesus Christ's sake. At the temple, when we take our flowers and put them before the shrine, and say that the "Lord Buddha is our refuge," and ask for help to live rightly, it seems that no answer comes. Buddha sleeps in Nirvana. Few of us are good enough to go there. But in Christ, the Bible says, all shall be made alive. It says that eternal life is begun here. Do you not pray? If you do not, why not try?'

Mrs Agnew had often asked herself that question, 'Why not?' especially in recent days, when a settled gloom had fallen upon her existence. Was it of any use? Could there be any change wrought by human supplication in the methodical sequence of natural events? She replied,—

'You have been gifted, suddenly, it seems, my child, with a perception which I have not got. Perhaps something prevents its attainment in some people. If you have found comfort, you have a treasure in your belief; but, among us, people who talk much about Christianity often practise it little, and this weakens the belief in its truth we might otherwise feel.'

'At the convent her reverence said yesterday that God speaks to men through the Lord Jesus Christ. It seems strange that English people, who have become great by Him, do not follow His precepts.'

The girl's earnestness arrested Helen's attention. This was a clear case of conviction. It was no

mere lesson acquired by reiteration at school. The phenomenon was wonderful. What were the conditions of its existence? Was it produced by mere passive receptivity? Did it arise from a mental acquiescence in a dogma, or did it accompany the active grasp of certain principles? What was to be the attitude of the disciple? Christ had said that he who would follow Him must bear a cross. She had herself a cross, and it had been with her for some time. Did she know how it was to be carried? Helen said at last,—

'Well, Kirimanica, we are often told that we can learn something from everybody. I think you have taught me some things. One day, perhaps, I will tell you how.'

The girl looked up half puzzled, and closely scrutinised the speaker's face. Helen smiled back, observing,—

'And now the picture is really finished. Tell me how you like it.'

The sitter rose, and approaching it, exclaimed,—

'It is me, just as the looking-glass would make me. Would English people call it pretty? I have often heard you speak of things as "pretty," and from the pictures I have seen in books your own face must be "pretty." But then you are fair, like the angels are drawn, and I am dark. No one draws dark angels.'

Helen could not forbear laughing at her *naïveté*. She answered,—

'There is beauty in every race. I ought not to tell you that you are pretty to all people. You are to me; but then that is only my opinion. Perhaps someone else will tell you one day how you look.'

Kirimanica said,—

'There is one thing not in the picture which I wish had been there.'

'And what is that?'

Kirimanica put her hand in her pocket and produced a little case, which, opened, proved to contain a cross of plain gold, with a slender chain for the neck.

'How come you to have this?' asked Helen.

'Some weeks ago,' she replied, 'Antone brought to me a bunch of lovely violets, such as never grow in Colombo, but, I have heard, are reared in Newera Elliya, and this case with it. He said the gentleman had sent them—the one I met in your house—Mr Gray. I did not know what I was to do. My father and mother would not wish me to take the gift; and yet it is a symbol of faith, and I thought it had a divine meaning. I could not bring myself to send it back, and so the possession of it has been a secret. It seemed to be no more than a token of goodwill from him; so I have kept it, and when I sleep by night it is fastened round my neck. Perhaps it is better for it not to be in the picture, but I cherish it. I had no means of speaking my thanks. Should you ever be able to say so much for me, will you tell him Kirimanica is grateful?'

'I will, my child, you may depend upon it. I think you may safely keep his present. He is a good man, and it comes from a talk we had about you one day.'

The articles were reverentially restored to the case, and put away.

The girl said her good-bye, for she was going away, for perhaps a month, with her parents to

Matila to stay with the Ratemahatmya at Mahaganga Waláwa, in order to keep the festival of the Wesak, or birth of Buddha.

Helen felt her loneliness more than ever. Did she go to the usual society resorts, she was conscious of a coolness which people wore towards her, which seemed to evidence their knowledge that something was wrong at Lotus Hall. Many of them, however, overcame their scruples when a dinner-party was given by the Agnews, for the *menu* and the wines were both choice; besides which, he was rich, and held a prominent place in the mercantile world. Helen received sufficient attention on these occasions, but was sensible that she had no real friends.

One afternoon Mrs Airlie was announced. Mrs Agnew was half inclined not to receive her, for she was always now associated in her mind with that unfortunate night at Ambalangoda, the recollection of which was so bitter. On second thoughts she decided to see Mrs Airlie, for she felt that she ought to speak plainly to her. The reception on her part was not very cordial. When they were seated, and tea was brought, Helen remarked,—

'I thought, Mrs Airlie, that you would have thought it necessary to make some sort of apology for leaving me alone, without your society, which was so essential, on the day which you yourself appointed for that trip to Ambalangoda.'

'Indeed! I had hoped that my telegram was sufficient.'

'I must tell you plainly that I did not think it so. Your absence put me in a painful position, and if we are to remain friends, I must have your

assurance that you were quite undesignedly prevented from coming.'

Here Helen caught the eye of the other and looked at her so pointedly that Mrs Airlie became quite red and uncomfortable. She answered,—

'With you I must be frank. I trust you, and I value your friendship. I purposely stayed away and went in another direction. Let me say that I thought, Mrs Agnew, that you would not be averse to a *tête-à-tête* with your own particular friend.'

In saying which she looked full at the other lady. It was Mrs Agnew's turn to feel uncomfortable, but for a moment only, for she had tried to do rightly. She replied,—

'You are mistaken. I should never have planned to put myself in a position subject naturally to misconstruction, however much partiality for a particular person might suggest it. I am sorry that it all happened as it did. Since that day I have been rendered less inclined for your society, and I will tell you frankly that things are said about you in Colombo which you would regret to hear, which are doubtless coloured by other ladies, but which account for the coolness which I daresay you have experienced.'

The visitor's hand, which held a cup of tea, trembled visibly, and she flushed all over. She suppressed her anger, and said, hurriedly and vehemently,—

'Surely you do not mean to say that you believe the mean and lying words that are bandied about at tea and tennis-parties to my discredit? I thought that your judgment would, at least, have been true and unbiased. I have tried to know you

well, because you always seemed so candid and so kind of heart, so lovely and so gentle. Believe me, I pray—I beseech you! To you I will say what I would not to any other living creature, and what no force would wring from me. I have long, as it were, lost my husband, knowing not his caresses nor his sympathy. When others have admired me I have accepted it, and when they have sought my society I have encouraged them; but I swear to you, before heaven, that I have never been untrue, in the sense you imply, to my husband. Say that you believe me, for pity's sake, and do not cast me off—one who has not a true friend in the world!'

She was on her knees before Helen, and had clasped one of her hands between her own, and Helen could feel the tears dropping. She answered, feeling deeply touched,—

'You have said enough. I believe you. I will be your friend if you will do one thing for me.'

'What is that?'

'Try to be reconciled to your husband, and to live for him for one year.'

Mrs Airlie rose, wiped her eyes, and walked to the window. She gazed for some minutes upon the lotus blossoms in the pond, now folding their petals at the approach of evening, then turned, and coming to Helen, took both her hands and pressed them, kissed her on both cheeks, and said,—

'I promise. But let me tell you something of my life, that you may not think I am altogether bad.' They sat down again to tea, and Mrs Airlie continued,—'I have been married only three years. I was nineteen when it took place. My father was a clergyman, and there are a lot of us, which made

matters very cramped at home. We used to try to help father as much as possible. I always used to think he felt us all to be a great burden, and determined myself to be off at the first opportunity. It came one day in the shape of my husband, who was then on leave from Ceylon, and staying with some neighbours of ours near the village for shooting. When he asked me, within a month of our meeting, to marry him, I did not think twice. He was a nice fellow, good-looking, and not too old, and he said that he had enough for us to live upon. And then the prospect of going to Ceylon was delightful. I had always heard that life in the East had no cares, was made up of dances, sky races, tennis and picnics, and that women were at a premium; just the thing for a poor parson's daughter. So we came out together, and have been in Colombo ever since. You know Jack is "in tea" here. I did my best to do what I promised before the altar; but, I think, after a year Jack got thoroughly tired of the whole thing. He was awfully nice at first. Nothing was good enough for me, and he never left me. But I was a novelty, that was all, and an attractive one, for I am pretty, I believe, and have good "points," as he used to say when he "viewed" me. Soon I began to realise that he did not care what became of me. I seemed to have been enjoyed to the full and then flung aside. He took to going to the club at nights, and I often sat up late for his return; but he regarded that as no favour, and even thought it a bore when I used to ask what luck he had had. Then he would go away for a week at a time to some estate up-country, and come back, in a surprise sort of way, without giving me word. Do

you wonder at my forming friendships with other people who showed themselves more attentive than my husband? I am a half-educated, frivolous girl, who has no resources in herself, can play a tune upon the piano, dance, ride, and read a novel, but who cannot think connectedly for two minutes, and positively go to sleep in five if I take up a serious book.'

Helen had listened attentively, and could not help feeling how parallel, in some particulars, the speaker's story was with her own. She almost seemed presumptuous in attempting to guide another who had acted very like she had herself done. But it ought to be done, so she said,—

'Most of us, when we marry, enter upon responsibilities which we have never realised fully beforehand; we decide often in too much haste. Most marriages are ill-assorted, and preserved from being absolute failures by the common sense of both parties, who see that it is absurd to attempt to review their relations when bound together by law. They do, in fact, make the best of what they cannot undo. I do not know whether most men ever feel that they are disappointed, but I am sure that most women do, because they expect too much.

> '"Man's love is of his life a thing apart;
> 'Tis a woman's whole existence."

The most supreme moment of happiness in a woman's life is that, I am told, in which she holds her first baby to her bosom, and I believe this often compensates for much pain that is felt in the weakening of a husband's love. You and I have no such consolation; but we have a duty before us.

That is, to relax in no effort to keep the love that we have once won. I bid you go and try, and bring to the effort all the earnestness you can.'

Although Helen had communicated none of the secrets of her own life, for to most people she displayed reserve in such matters, yet a spring of silent sympathy had sprung up between the two women which revealed more than words could ; and now the rose colour which tinted the room and all within as the setting sun shone through the windows seemed, in some sense, to be an augury of brighter thoughts and brighter days than the future had appeared before to promise.

Their conversation was terminated by the arrival of a servant with letters by the English mail, and Mrs Airlie, remarking that she was sure that her friend would like to be left alone with her correspondence, took her leave warmly.

Among the letters was one from Caselli. He wrote with all the gladness of a child to announce that he was free for a few months, and had decided to come to Ceylon and to pay the Agnews his promised visit. At the first perusal, for Helen, there was nothing but a feeling of delight. To see him once more—the being, she thought, whom she most revered and loved in the world — to renew with him her early life and all its memories, and to witness his pleasure in doing the same; his happiness in seeing her in her own home, in her married life. Ah, there! That was the one thing she could not wish him to see! How different it was from that which they had all anticipated it would be! What could be done to restore harmony before he would arrive? For a month now she had striven to win back her husband's regard by every gentle

look and word that she could conjure up. But he was still implacable. They met only at meals, and, to save appearances before the servants, he would then pass a few remarks upon general topics of the day. But his coolness towards her was studied and unvarying.

This evening, after long pondering, she decided that she would seek her husband, even at the sacrifice of some self-respect, and at the hazard of fresh repulse—that she would seek him with her father's letter in her hand, and make that a plea for a complete reconciliation.

Mrs Agnew called her maid, and, with her assistance, dressed with more than usual care. A costume was selected very similar in colour and trimming to the very one she had worn at Heath Lodge when she had summoned George to hear the reply to his proposal, and her hair was arranged this evening in the style that he had then admired. She regarded herself in the glass when ready. She might have been the same Helen as left her home in Hampstead two years ago. The beauty and purity of face still remained, and the rounded and well-moulded bust and arms, and the texture of skin like satin; but the lines under the violet eyes were rather darker than of yore, and the corners of the delicate mouth were accentuated. She was pleased, like all women, to think that she yet could charm, and saw no degeneracy in her looks such as the Tropics so often hasten.

For a long time she hesitated how to approach her husband, with what words and in what manner. To tell the truth, her sensitive nature feared another repulse, worse, perhaps, than others which had preceded it. And then she feared that it

might be followed by a more prolonged and complete estrangement. Helen decided at length to trust to chance and to the circumstances of the moment for what she might be prompted to say.

It was with a slow step and a timid one that she proceeded to her husband's study. The door was nearly closed, and she thought that it would be as well to knock. His voice replied, 'Come in.'

He looked up, surprised at his wife's entrance. The only light was that of a reading-lamp upon the table, which illuminated the papers and books below it, but left the rest of the room in obscurity. They could not see each other distinctly. There was a weariness in his tones which told of dejection, evidenced also by the deepening lines upon his face. Since the scene with Helen, upon her return from Ambalangoda, all the brightness seemed to have gone out of his life.

She advanced to his side and put her hand upon his shoulder, as had been her wont, and said,—

'George, I have had a letter from my father by the mail this evening, in which he says that he hopes shortly to be with us. Will you read it?'

She laid it before him and he perused it several times, striving to gain time before comment should be necessary. It was she who recommenced.

'You would like him to have a happy time here, I am sure, would you not? such as he anticipates. How is he to find us? Oh, George, I am pained to the heart to think that he should know what has passed!' She knelt by his side and put her two hands on his arm. 'Will you not try that we shall be as we once were—when we left Heath Lodge? Darling husband, look upon the wife who

loves you better than all the world, and take her back to your heart.'

By chance, that day—or was it pre-ordained?—the books and papers upon his table had been re-arranged and dusted, and upon the top of all, at his right hand, had presented itself an old Bible which had once been his mother's. A faded marker, undisturbed for many years, pointed to the words, 'Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful. Judge not and ye shall not be judged.' He had been curiously turning over the leaves shortly before his wife's entrance. The book was not often opened, and mere chance, it then seemed, had obtruded the marker upon his attention. The words had never appeared so vivid. He knew that he had been wrong all these weeks in shutting up his sympathy from his wife—a mere child in worldly experience; that he was going the way to break her heart, and perhaps to drive her to the worst fate in which a woman can be involved. His pride had been the insuperable obstacle. At this moment, as she knelt by him and turned upon him those pleading eyes full of unfathomable feeling, he would have none of it, and he conquered it.

Agnew stooped and lifted his wife on to his knee and clasped her in a tight embrace, kissing her eyes and cheeks and lips as he used to do. He exclaimed,—

'You have come back to me this evening, looking, dearest, like my promised wife on that well-remembered evening in Hampstead. I have been wrong. I see it and know it. It was I who left you alone and unguided to fall into temptation, and it is I own who ask your forgiveness. Let us start

afresh to love and to cherish one another till death us do part, and may no more clouds come over the sunshine of our existence.'

'Husband, darling,' she said, 'I am indeed a happy wife once more, but it is not you alone who have been wrong. I was giddy and unthinking, perhaps vain, and have brought this trouble upon us. Help me in my ignorance, and let me lie here often, where I seem to feel your love and to gain the strength I lack. It seems as if we had passed through some dreadful storm in which we had been separated, but now the sun shines again, and we are sailing in smooth waters. Let us forget the past month, or try to do so.'

They remained silent while the peace was ratified by a thousand caresses.

Before they left the room Helen noticed, with surprise, the open Bible upon the table, and, drawing it towards her, saw the faded marker worked by hands long since lifeless. Agnew aided her to find the place indicated and put his finger upon the lines. He said,—

'I was reading these just before you came into the room, dearest of my heart!'

She perused them with interest, looked up with quick perception, and kissed him.

The book after this used to lie upon her boudoir table, and she often read from it, and he, too.

The dinner was quite a gay affair, and the altered circumstances of the household were reflected even in the faces of the servants, who had for weeks past been conscious of the gloom which reigned around, and after dinner there was music and song, such as cheered the heart as of yore

under the cedars and among the rose bushes of Caselli's villa.

Yet another strange incident was to occur to-night.

Husband and wife were sitting in his study, talking over matters long pent up, and happy in the sunshine of awakened love, when a servant entered, bearing a card upon a salver. Agnew was surprised at an intrusion, even by a friend, at ten o'clock at night, and little less than thunderstruck when he read the superscription on the card:—

MR HAROLD NORTON.

He could not refrain from starting, and felt himself aglow with passion and shame. He mastered his feelings, however, and simply said to Helen,—

'A visitor, dearest, upon business; he will not be long. You had better go to your boudoir meantime.'

She retreated, but in the half light in the hall the figure standing at the front door seemed to be familiar to her.

Norton was bidden to enter Agnew's study. The latter leaned back in his easy-chair with an arm on each side. The lamp, shaded as before, did not throw a strong light upon the men's faces.

Norton advanced half-way between the door and the table, where Agnew sat, and halted, as it were a criminal before his judge. His gaze sank before Agnew's piercing glance. He was the first to speak. He said,—

'Agnew, I have come here, after my treacherous conduct, to give you any satisfaction that you may

wish to take. I attempted to do you a foul wrong. I am repentant. If I could I would unsay what has passed. Take your revenge in any way you please; I offer no resistance.'

Agnew made no sign save to clutch the arms of the chair with his hands.

Norton continued,—

'You hate my presence, doubtless. I am about to relieve you of it for ever. I have parted with my estate and am on the eve of sailing for South Africa, on my way to Blantyre.'

He waited awhile for Agnew's reply. There was a painful pause of several minutes. At last the latter spoke.

'Sir, you have tried to do me the worst wrong one man can do to another—to destroy his happiness for life, and to tempt a woman, his wife, to perdition. I can say nothing to you. I want no words with you. You say that you are repentant; it may be so. God is the scrutineer of your heart; but you cannot suppose that I, another man, with the infirmities of human nature, can believe what you profess without proof of your sincerity. Leave me, untouched and unhurt. Let me warn you that remorse for the evil you would have compassed will sting you for ever.'

He waved his hand towards the door, rose from his chair, and walked to the window. Norton turned without more words, strode to the door, and down the hall to his carriage. Before ascending, he cast one look back up the passage leading to Helen's boudoir. She was on the point of coming out; a faint smile played about her lips, and she made a slight sign with her hand which seemed to signify 'Adieu.'

Norton said to himself,—

'At least she has forgiven me.'

It was the last time they were to see each other, and in her mind the memory of his ill-starred love faded gradually away in the mists of the past.

CHAPTER XII

THE Mahaganga Walåwa was situated on the slope of one of the charming hills that surround Matila. The hoary tors of worn gneiss rose two thousand feet above the valley behind the house, and girdling the hills were masses of primeval jungle. The forest almost reached to the back of the Walåwa, a spacious, red-tiled but unpretentious house, with a number of barns and cattle-sheds, all nestling in the shade of mighty tamarinds and banyans. Down the slopes of the ravines, which intersected the hills, were thick groves of areca and cocoanut palms, with here and there a patch of untouched nature in the shape of kumbuk and palu trees, grey with age, and overgrown with moss and orchids. The wild parts of the estates served as pasture for cattle, while lower down, in the well-watered valley, were wide acres of carefully fenced in emerald green rice and luxuriant plantains. Beyond again, bold and jagged hills bounded the eastern horizon, and their peaks, especially the giant Hunusgiriya, caught the clouds as they drifted up from the south-west, and sent their moisture trickling down in silver streams to the fertile valley below. Mahaganga Walåwa had belonged to the Panabokki family for hundreds of years, and the present owner, the Ratemahatmya, regarded his ancestry with pride, as a Kan-

dyan chief, and at the present time was a person of considerable wealth and local influence.

At the season of the Wesak he was expected to entertain largely. Relatives and dependents came from all parts within a circuit of twenty or thirty miles, and were accommodated in temporary huts constructed of interwoven palm leaves and thatched with grass. It was an animating sight. The front of the house and of these structures were decorated with plantain stems crowned with their shiny, deep green leaves, mingled with palm fronds dexterously cut into strips about as fine as hairs; the columns of the verandah were wound with long wreaths of stag moss, while, for colour, there, here and there, peeped out the red hibiscus and the yellow alamander. A large arch of bamboos projected from the porch, was hung with foliage in the same fashion, bore flags of various designs on the spires, and by night displayed clusters of coloured lamps. In a conspicuous place, worked upon a cloth in bold letters, according to the language of the country, were the words, 'Welcome to all.' The noise of large and small drums, and of reed instruments, was heard at intervals all day, and only ceased at the hour of rest. Troops of raucous crows, drawn by the unwonted bustle and the abundant leavings of food that were thrown away, fluttered about the buildings and the neighbouring trees, helping to swell the din with their hoarse cries, and occasionally making a bold dash at the very dish from which a guest was feeding. Even the lizards, which abound in the jungles, watched from safe places of vantage, and with curiosity, the lively panorama, running back in haste to their holes sometimes when anything unusually

alarming came to view. Hungry dogs strolled up from their village homes and stalked about the outskirts, snarling betimes at each other, or, deeply penetrated by some savoury odour, raising their noses in the air, and howling in unison with the music of the band. Patches of waste ground, where rice had been thrown away, were lighted up with the flashing colours—red, blue and yellow —of magnificent butterflies, falling easy victims, some of them, while intent upon feasting upon the fermenting matter, to the children, who led them captive with a piece of cotton secured under the wings. Sparrows in numbers twittered upon the roof or dusted themselves upon the carriage drive, while grey squirrels chased each other, with piercing shrieks, in and out of the masses of foliage that were spread along the house front, and nibbled at every tender bud or shoot that took their fancy.

The holiday was a happy one to the visitors. The early rains from the south-west had commenced to fall in occasional showers, which sufficed, with a gentle breeze, to cool the air. The jungles and hedges were looking their best, decked here and there with wild flowers. There were lots of dishes prepared daily to flavour the masses of rice boiled in immense brass cauldrons, and partaken of on platters of leaves, and eaten upon the ground; and the fact of feeding at the generous Ratemahatmya's expense was in itself a source of satisfaction to many. Others had a pleasure in meeting with friends whom, from the remoteness of their villages, they seldom saw, and the babble sustained all day by the numbers who wanted to talk at the same time almost drowned the noise of the crows. All were in their best garments and

displaying rich jewellery, without which, in the East, female charms are considered to be incomplete. The neat white jackets of the women, with pretty lace trimming, with the wrapper of coloured silk round the limbs from waist to ankle, set off their forms to advantage, and the varied tints gave to the crowd, viewed at a little distance, a kaleidoscopic effect.

There was unlimited distribution of the much-loved chewing materials—areca, lime, and the leaf of the betel vine—and the red juice arising from mastication was squirted freely around in the intervals of conversation. The guests of consideration were entertained in the Walàwa, which had a number of rooms, but which were furnished rather scantily and shabbily with European furniture. This was regarded as a sign of modern progress, and of familiarity with Colombo fashions. But neither the taste of the Ratemahatmya nor that of his wife could suggest for ornamentation more than a few mirrors and cut-glass chandeliers for the decoration of the reception-rooms. Wines and imported foods largely composed the repasts indoors, and the table round which the guests sat was loaded with fruit and flowers.

The Panabokki family were among the most welcome guests, partly from their near relationship to the host, and partly from the fact that the daughter had for long been looked upon by the heads of both families as the destined bride of the Ratemahatmya's son, Rámbanda. He was a fine, stalwart specimen of a Kandyan, and wore an imposing beard and moustaches. He had accustomed himself from his boyhood to regard Kirimanica as his own, and on this occasion had

hoped to bring the question of their union to an issue. He went himself to meet the party at the railway station, and deferentially helped the girl out of the train, giving her some of the well-remembered flowers that they used to sport with and throw at each other in their childhood. As they trotted in a capacious bullock-coach, behind a fine pair of milk-white animals with their jingling bells, up to the Waláwa, he felt pleased to see the girl's interested looks, and her childish glee in the once familiar surroundings. She had, too, many a kindly glance for him, although feeling but a sisterly affection for the lad who had been the constant companion of early days.

When the party arrived at their destination there was a great demonstration. The drums and pipes almost drowned the voices of the guests and their hosts; flowers were strewn upon the pathway and under the porch; and jets of rosewater, from long silver ewers with narrow orifices, were directed to the new arrivals, especially to Kirimanica, and the oldest servant of the Ratemahatmya's establishment stepped forward and threw a garland of white jasmine round her neck. It had somehow got about among the retainers and visitors that the girl was the destined bride of Rámbanda. His father came forward and patted her upon the head, and asked her smilingly if she had now come to stay with them for good. He added that Rámbanda was expectant, and had waited patiently.

Kirimanica felt herself getting warm with embarrassment, and could find no words with which to express herself. But in her mind she determined that very day to put an end to the anticipations of

all parties, painful though it might be. Ever since that evening when Charles Gray had been brought into their house, a change had set in. Even before that she had not cared to regard Rámbanda in the light of a future husband. The rapid development of her ideas under the influence of education, the daily widening vista of life which knowledge had opened out before her, and the habit of introspection which it had cultivated, all disinclined her for the inevitable monotony, the unquestioning submission, and the drudgery of domestic life at the Mahaganga Waláwa, in which, indeed, her freedom would be wholly curtailed.

Rámbanda was a good, honest, brave and manly fellow, but he was unimaginative and unimpressionable, and his whole thought was in the perpetuation of the farming operations on the estates by the identical methods pursued by his forefathers for two thousand years. The idea of marrying Kirimanica had become with him a fixed one. It had always been encouraged in the family, and frequently referred to from their childhood. He did not know how he had been eclipsed by another, nor how the adoption by the girl of the Christian faith had inspired her with an individual freedom and a fixity of purpose which she had not before possessed.

They all sat down that morning to a splendid breakfast, rendered the more luxurious by the magnificent prospect viewed from the windows. The verdant valley with the silver stream lying in bands and loops, as it were, upon the bright green vestment of young rice, which at this season clothed the soil; the masses of wild hills that rose beyond, some dark, in purple shades, obscured by

rolling clouds of white vapour rising from the ravines which intersected them, others receiving the full sunshine, and presenting various tints upon their rugged slopes where forest or grassland or patches of tea prevailed. And then, close at hand, a wealth of flowers—the blue and white convolvuli, bushes laden with gorgeous red shoe flowers, and clusters of fragrant oleander.

The meal over, those who cared to do so sought repose, and others wandered outside to speak to the people, or the men to smoke. Kirimanica sighed for the days when she ran about half-clothed after the butterflies, or paddled in the stream, or gambolled with the kids and calves in the scrub jungle of the mountain. Now she was expected to be sedate, to look for the most part upon the ground, to move about at a slow pace, and only to speak when addressed. She fretted under these restraints. To-day she thought that she would like to mount the slope above the house, and, seated at the verge of the forest, enjoy the view of distant Matila and the bold peak of Hunusgiriya which she had always loved. So several attendants were told off to accompany her, and Rámbanda naturally escorted her. The path was mostly in forest shade, but at the desired spot it opened out, and some well-worn boulders projecting through the ground afforded convenient sitting-places.

The girl and her lover sat down, and the servants respectfully withdrew. Rámbanda was of few words, and, although struggling to speak, found it difficult to express himself. For a time he contented himself with concentrating his gaze upon the girl. He had, he thought, never seen any

so beautiful, and her graces, polished by town life, gave her additional charm. It was true that her accomplishments made her rather alarming to him.

Of his studies at the Buddhist Boys' School in Matila, Rámbanda scarcely remembered more than to read and write. At the same time, to a man's sense, her cultivation, which had brought her so much refinement, made her the more worth courting and possessing.

Kirimanica would rather have been alone. She felt embarrassed by her cousin's presence, having a feeling that a particular object had led him there. She busied herself in weaving a chaplet of white convolvulus, which struggled over the jungle within reach.

At last Rámbanda spoke.

'Kirimanica, you do not say much to me. If you knew how daily and nightly I think of you, you would be kinder. Years ago, when we ran about these fields together, and played hide-and-seek down in the areca grove, you used to call me "your husband," and you said you would never marry another. Now, all that was so kind and loving seems to have gone out from you. You seem grave, and the smile that always played upon your face rarely comes.'

She felt forced to say something, and if it were to be disagreeable she could not help herself.

'My dear brother, I have you always in my affection. How could I forget him with whom I have been playmate and sister ever since I could walk?—one with whom I have shared joys and sorrows? But you must not think that any girl can abide the same from infancy to womanhood.

I like you, love you, as ever, only as my brother. But I can never marry you!'

She had turned to face him, gazed with her dark velvety eyes filled with tears straight into his, and had placed her hand upon his arm, knowing assuredly what a cruel disappointment he was to feel. He had looked at her once as she finished speaking, and then fixed his eyes in a moody manner upon the ground. In a few minutes he roused himself, and drew a packet from his pocket. It was wrapped in red silk, and upon withdrawing the cover he revealed a magnificent gold necklace of vine leaves, each of which was studded and worked in graceful design with sapphires, rubies, aquamarine, garnets, and other gems of Ceylon, by the matchless art of the native jeweller. It was fit for a princess. He held it pendant from his fingers towards the girl, and said,—

'I have had no pleasures. For the past two years I have set myself to get this for you. It is my share of the profits of the estates. I thought to-day I should have clasped it on your neck, in token that you were to be my love—my life! It seems it cannot be, but perhaps you will wear it in remembrance of one who loves you better than all.'

The incident was so painful to the sensitive girl that she placed her hands to her face, stooped, and wept. She almost felt constrained to give way and to recall her words, and thus play the unselfish part; but she felt the pressure of the gold cross in her bosom, and her resolve was strengthened.

'I cannot, dear brother,' she said. 'I should despise myself in doing so, but I feel how kind your thought has been. I am truly grateful for

your affection, but the jewels must rest one day upon the neck of one who is your own—one who will be more worthy than I, and whom you will find if you seek, I am sure. Now, let us return. I am sorry for this day, and yet it is right that I spoke.'

He rose in silence, tied up the necklace in the silk wrapper, and put it away. As they left the spot he felt for her little soft hand, and retaining it in his grasp for a moment, gently pressed and released it. It was the last time he was with her.

It was on the night of this day that the great festival of the Wesak was kept throughout Buddhist Ceylon. Especially in the Kandyan villages was it observed with display.

There would be a great procession through the streets of Matila. The Ratemahatmya had, as usual, lent his four elephants—one a noble tusker—which were trapped with cloths and head-pieces of scarlet and silver, and bore upon their ample backs canopies and domes in colours to contain images of the Lord Buddha in silver and brass. Then there were cars, decorated with flowers, whose panels outwardly represented, in vivid tints, scenes in the Holy One's life. Ahead of the procession, and at intervals along the line, were groups of torch-bearers, and of musicians using lustily their reed instruments and kettledrums. Here and there clusters of dancers and singers, and, marching in rear, clothed in white, the venerable custodian of the Alu Vihara Temple, whither the procession was bound, and following, a stream of people carrying banners of their own device, mostly of red and white calico; some on two

poles extending across the road, decorated with moss and palms, and lighted with coloured lamps. It was a grand affair, and one in which high and low, rich and poor, were equally interested, and at which the smallest children were allowed to assist until midnight.

The Ratemahatmya and his party viewed the long procession as it passed after dark along the road which partly bounded his wide lands. There were a few police about, but everyone was so good-tempered and accommodating that there was little necessity for enforcing order, and their presence was scarcely wanted.

As Kirimanica looked out of the window of the spacious bullock coach in which she sat, she suddenly saw pass Mr Gray, who, as the chief official at Matila, had ridden down to see that all was well. He did not recognise her in the crowd. She felt as if she quite glowed, and involuntarily clasped the gold cross within her silk vest. She was glad that in the interior of the carriage, where all was dark, the others could not observe her. He had occupied her thoughts much since their last meeting at Mrs Agnew's, and she scarcely could suppose that chance would bring them together again. It was sad, but what could he want with a humble and obscure little Singhalese girl? Perhaps she was already wholly forgotten. Still, he afforded her an ideal—something which every man and woman must have—an ideal of consciousness of physical and intellectual power, of refined reserve, of undaunted courage, yet of kindliness and gentleness, which called forth in the girl something more than admiration.

An immense crowd was gathered in the vicinity of the temple, seeking entrance by the narrow paths and roughly-hewn steps that led up the slope on which it is situated. The cavern in which lies the recumbent figure of Buddha is in one of the two gigantic rocks, which, rising perpendicularly, face each other, and leave but a small space for the congregation. To-night, oil lamps were disposed, row upon row, round the rocks and along the sides of the approaches, and numbers of flags waved in the mountain breeze. Masses of flowers had been flung by devotees in front of the Buddha, and the fragrance of these, with the odour of incense, mingled in a peculiar way with the pungent smell of a thousand bats, who found the rocks a convenient habitat.

A money-box was placed in a prominent place; as also a large receptacle to receive small offerings of oil for maintaining lights in the temple. Those who were too poor to give the money, poured in a small quantity of oil. But there were many well-to-do people who contributed plenty of rupees, and the custodian of the temple regarded the weighty box with much satisfaction.

Even the poor monks attached to the Alu Vihara felt more than usually comfortable to-day, for the religious enthusiasm of the villagers had been roused, and the tours of the monks with their begging bowls, in search of food, in the forenoon, had been more than usually successful. They had, for once, been well fed, and, besides, had received a quantity of areca and betel leaves, which they had been chewing all day—not even a monk being able to deny himself so grateful an indulgence.

Dharmaputa, the high priest, had come specially to officiate at the temple to-night, and his discourse had commenced when the Ratemahatmya's party arrived. A way was made in the narrow court for the distinguished visitors, and they were able, from where they sat, to get a good view of the vividly-painted pictures of hell and its various torments which adorn the exterior face of the cavern. The colours had been recently renewed, and were very vivid. Some victims were being forced by demons to climb trees bristling with sharp thorns; others were being thrown upon beds of upturned knives; while large beetles were busy in eating into the vitals of a few. Flames of fire surrounded these graphic scenes. It is apparent that, even in Buddhism, the greater number must be frightened into being moral. Might it be called necessary to the first stage of religious belief?

Kirimanica found some interest in the discourse, owing to the similarity in some of the events related of Buddha to those of the life of Christ which she had heard in the convent school.

Dharmaputa stood at the edge of the narrow verandah or platform which led into the cavern where the Lord Buddha lay undisturbed in his long sleep, never, never to awake, nor to give his disciples any sign of his existence, which had practically ceased. The High Priest was a man of unblemished life and of great learning, and was attentively listened to by those within hearing—perhaps three or four hundred. The rest, numbering as many thousand, were sitting on the ground on the hillsides around the Wihara, where a multitude of lamps lit up the colours of

their variegated costumes. Dharmaputa had a trace of bitterness in his tone, for he took no satisfaction in the modern features of Buddhism. The loose lives of some of the younger monks, and their venal purposes, especially raised his ire; the idle, useless habits of others also; and he saw a declension in the morality of the mass, in the laxity of the marriage tie, and in the use of strong drink, which prompted violent crimes. So, to-night, one of those occasions when he had a large audience, he was very emphatic and searching in his remarks. Kirimanica could not help comparing him with St Paul. His excellent memory enabled him to speak without reference to the palm-leaf inscriptions, and his hands, thus freed, were used to purpose in gesticulation. He spoke first of the circumstances attending the immaculate birth of Buddha, of the great renunciation, of the miracles which showed his title to their implicit confidence, of his moral injunctions. Up to this he commanded close attention, but in discussing the philosophical aspects of the 'Eight-fold' and the 'Four-fold' way of virtue he strode into depths to which his hearers could not follow, and attention flagged; many nodded, or leant their heads upon the shoulders of neighbours and slept. However, he conscientiously kept them until midnight, when a circle of yellow-robed monks, seated upon the floor, in nasal, prolonged tones chanted praises to Buddha. Now and then the crowd interposed, 'We will take refuge in the Lord Buddha.'

As the people rose to go, rockets shot up in the air, breaking into blue, red and green stars, and, in playfulness, crackers were fired off to

intimate that the serious part of the evening was over. Dharmaputa mounted the summit of the precipitous rock over the temple, to which access could be had by holding to an iron rail. From the top he could view the rolling hills and deeply-cut valleys of Matila and Kandy. The golden moonlight threw a veil of chastity over the scene. All was peace; the streams of lights revealed the retreating devotees wearily departing homewards.

He clasped his hands in front of him, saying, 'Have they gone in peace? I fear not! For sixty years this wretched being has been seeking for it and has failed. Only beyond the grave, and then uncertain!' The night breeze blew chill, and he drew his robe tightly round him as he descended, and by the light of a solitary oil-lamp threw himself upon a mat, to spend part of the night in repose.

The Ratemahatmya's trotting bulls swung along at a good pace, and in half an hour they were at the gates of the long approach to the house.

Kirimanica, who was next her mother, whispered,—

'Dharmaputa, Terunánse, tells us not of peace until after many lives. You know better than I do, mother; can you find no peace here?'

The mother said,—

'Daughter, this is a life of trouble; all the misdeeds of the past must be redeemed, and who knows what past each has had? Hope, but strive always. Be virtuous, be kind to all. Perhaps you will pass hence to a better life.'

The girl sighed to herself to think of the shreds of comfort possessed by the elder woman. 'Was

that all, then? The great renunciation might have meant much more, but was never taught to imply sacrificial efficacy. Christ's mission was complete, and the prayer to God which he had taught lifted her, she knew, to the atmosphere of faith. Perhaps Buddha never prayed! That was a curious reflection.'

Everyone in the coach was silent as the vehicle went slowly up the steep ascent to the Waláwa. Suddenly the sound of a shot broke the stillness of the night, and echoed from a hundred hills. The bitterns roosting on the kumbuk trees raised a chorus of hoarse croaks, several owls flew from their leafy shelters into the moonlight, seeking some less dangerous resort, and a flock of flying foxes left their favourite guava trees and hovered lazily overhead until all should be again quiet.

'That shot sounds near,' said the Ratemahatmya; 'most likely it is Rámbanda after the wild pig. They have been doing a deal of damage among the young paddy lately. He is a good son. Nothing is forgotten, and I feel it a comfort that the estates and rank of my fathers will be in the keeping of one who is so worthy. Would that he had a wife meet for him, and that I might look upon his children.'

Here he extended his hand and took that of Kirimanica. She understood the suggestion, and involuntarily withheld hers, but for a moment only. The venerable old man was so kind and generous that she had not the heart to pain him. But she was truthful, and she recoiled from seeming in any way to encourage a false impression. The darkness lent her courage, and she determined then and there, before her parents, to

make her uncle aware of her resolve. She said,—

'Dear uncle, you have been to me from childhood almost like my father, and I fear to pain you. Yet I must be true and release you from doubt. Since my parents have given me choice, I have thought often what I would do. And now I must tell you that I can never marry Rámbanda, who yet will ever be like a brother to me. I am sorry, for you wished it. But I could not love him as a wife should. Most girls would have no voice in this, but my beloved father and mother have given me what others lack—freedom. Forgive me for the pain I shall cause.'

Panabokki here interposed, saying,—

'To-night, child, you are tired; another time things will look different. You must make allowance for the caprice of one so young,' addressing the Ratemahatmya; 'she will change yet, no doubt. Modern ways of education put strange ideas into the heads of these children. She knows little yet, brother. A year, it may be, or two years, will work a different frame of mind, and you may yet see the union you have always wished for.'

The Ratemahatmya concealed his disappointment, which he felt keenly, and at this juncture they arrived at the house. It was blazing with lights. Rows of little oil lamps in glasses outlined the exterior, and were hung in the trees close to the Waláwa; festoons of coloured lanterns bordered the garden, while the cut-glass chandeliers in the interior were fully supplied with wax tapers.

There were coffee, wine and sweet cakes for

those who cared for refreshments, of which some of the guests partook. Outside, in a temporary hall, built of palm leaves and bamboo, a stupendous supper of curry and rice and sweetmeats had been prepared for those visitors whose rank did not entitle them to enter the house. They had arrived in straggling parties from the Alu Vihara. So it was very late when the last wrapped himself like a mummy from head to foot in a sheet, and, with a blessing on his lips for the Ratemahatmya, sought repose on a bed of clean rice straw.

About that time Rámbanda came back, put his gun quietly on the rack, and, being in working clothes, avoided the reception-room and went to bed. One or two men who were with him, on being asked what had detained them, kept an unusual silence, ate their share of the repast and retired.

Then all was still.

CHAPTER XIII

As the pale light of early morn fell upon the peak of Hunusgiriya, and the caw of the first crow had hardly been heard at the Mahaganga Waláwa, the inhabitants were startled by the approach of a squad of native police. The steady tramp of their feet awoke the watchers who habitually lie round the outskirts of great men's houses. Alarm and astonishment filled all who heard the object of their coming. Perhaps there was some indignation, too, for, in the native view, a chief may commit unpunished almost all offences for which a common man would suffer. The police had come to arrest Rámbanda.

It would seem that for some time past the Ratemahatmya's boundary fence, away down in the valley by the paddy field, had constantly been damaged by a neighbour who held that his own ground had been encroached upon. On the preceding night the chief's son had taken it into his head to go down that way to endeavour himself to chastise the aggressor if he should meet him. He was not in the mood for the religious service at the Vihara. He was rather savage and despondent at his repulse by Kirimanica. To throw himself again in her society he had resolved not to do. His love would never again be offered to her, perhaps to no woman. He did not much care what became of himself. He sup-

posed he would remain on the estates to succeed to their possession, but purposeless, and without the interest he had had. In this mood he started off with two servitors to patrol the boundary. There was a moon, obscured occasionally by clouds. The night was still, except for the bark of a stag calling occasionally to the herd. But as Rámbanda and his men silently approached the valley, above the murmur of the stream there was audible the noise of breaking twigs and sticks, and of subdued voices. They crept forward under the shadow of the oleander bushes, and came thus within view of the spot, where a party of men were engaged in pulling down the fence. The chief's son was so roused that he forgot moderation. He had intended that a good beating should be administered, but having the loaded gun in his hands, upon the impulse of the moment he raised it and fired. It had a ball cartridge, and one of the invading party fell back with a groan and a crash into the weeds and brushwood. Rámbanda felt a chill penetrate him, and, in a moment, deplored his own impetuosity. He stepped forward with his two men, in the full light of the moon, to answer for his deed. But the other party, giving him but a glance, made off with the wounded man as quickly as they could, fearing a further attack. His companions, knowing the gravity of the offence as viewed by the modern Courts, were frightened in the extreme, as they were likely to be regarded as abettors. Rámbanda reassured them, and told them that the blame was upon him. No harm should come to them. They restored so much of the broken fence as they could, and returned, silently and sorrowfully, to the Waláwa. It was

a bad business, they thought. More would be heard of it.

It was the sound of Rámbanda's gun which the family, returning from the Alu Vihara, had heard in the distance.

Just now the golden gleams of sunrise were streaking the eastern sky, and all the household were wide awake, for the bad news could not be hushed.

The wounded man was believed to be dying, his deposition had been taken by the only magistrate in Matila—Mr Gray. He could say little. But the police inquiry had elicited that the son of the Ratemahatmya had emerged from the shade with a gun in his hands immediately after the shot, and the motive for shooting was apparent.

There was a warrant for the arrest of Rámbanda, and a demand for the gun. The discharged cartridge was in the barrel.

It was a terrible morning. In all the traditions of the family, going back for hundreds of years, no member had ever been known to be a criminal; its history had been one of an honourable and respected race. The poor old father was almost paralysed with anguish; his son—his best beloved, on whom all his hopes, his cherished plans, had rested from childhood upwards, who seemed to be intertwined with the very tendrils of his heart's life—was he to be led away as a felon—like a common marauder or thief? It was his first impulse to urge Rámbanda to fly. The dense jungles would easily afford him concealment. Then he remembered his trusted position; the honourable regard of the Government; the upturned gaze of hundreds of dependents; the keen

scrutiny of his friends—the neighbouring chiefs; and then he scorned the suggestion. No, the law must be obeyed, be the issue what it may. He turned to his own room and wept bitterly alone. That over, he forced himself to be calm and to face the people outside. Save his own relatives, all the visitors were aware that their presence was no longer, under the circumstances, desired, and some were engaged in packing up, while others stood in a crowd, silent, respectful and sympathetic. Some shed natural tears, others ejaculated in mournful tones. Most of them thought that Rámbanda had done no great harm in shooting a common man who was caught in an unlawful act, and felt that the judge would probably take that view. But the present indignity was poignantly grievous.

Kirimanica had heard the bad news from a female attendant, and, with a loose silk robe wrapped round her, was peeping through the glass of an upper window, alarm and sorrow depicted in her face. She felt in some measure guilty for what had happened. He had, no doubt, been angry and disappointed after his interview with her, and, in that mood, had lost his usual control. She was sensible that others who knew would be tinctured with this notion, and she did not like the idea of facing the family that morning. One thing she could do. She would pray for the unfortunate young man, and she knelt by the side of her bed with the sincere conviction that there was One who would hear her for Christ's sake.

The sound of a vehicle driving up to the door made her start to her feet. The Ratemahatmya had persuaded the police to drive the prisoner to

Matila in a closed coach. The sergeant was reluctant, but yielded to the persuasion of the old man. The prisoner begged for one minute's grace, and, turning to where his father stood, threw his arms round his neck in an anguish of grief, and burying his face in the old man's bosom, burst into sobs which shook his whole frame. He had realised that he was leaving his home and all he loved, perhaps for ever. In the presence of so many the Ratemahatmya steeled himself against the emotion which almost overpowered him, but placed his hands caressingly upon his son's head. The light of his life was going. He knew it, and there was no use in trying to deceive himself.

The prisoner was called peremptorily, and, tearing himself away, leapt into the coach, followed by the escort, and in a few minutes was out of sight in the winding avenue.

The father waved his hand in farewell to the sorrowing groups, and aching with a grief that the loss of the nearest and dearest alone can engender, he staggered to his room, where he secluded himself in the anticipation of the worst.

The domestics, speaking in whispers, busied themselves in dismantling the flags, the flowers, the coloured lights, and all that had yesterday given brightness and cheerfulness to the holiday.

Kirimanica sought her mother's side and sat for hours with her arms round her, unable to speak her fears, but feeling for her sympathy, knowing her, as all children do, to be the best friend the world can give. At times the girl would ask herself, 'Could she do nothing to help Rámbanda in his fearful straits?' A plan presented itself, and only one; difficult—almost impossible to a young

maiden like herself, and one improbable of success. The thought did violence to her modesty, and she felt, as it crossed her mind, as if she coloured all over. But it took possession of her, and she could devise no other. It was constantly recurring to her, and every time with more force, until she felt as if, in answer to her prayers, she were receiving a supernatural suggestion. It was her duty to try. If she failed, it would be herself only that would suffer. She determined to think well of it in the night hours, and to endeavour to summon up that courage which she would so much need for the adventure. It was the most formidable enterprise that in her youth and maidenhood she could undertake, and wholly foreign to her habits, and to the prejudices of her race.

The day of gloom and dispiritedness slowly passed, and the inhabitants of the Waláwa betook themselves early to bed to seek, if possible, the

> 'Sweet sleep that knits the ravelled sleeve of care.'

Kirimanica was far from able to compose herself. After her hair had been arranged by an attendant, and her toilet for the night was completed, she sat in her lace wrapper by the window side gazing upon the moonlit hills, and planning with herself the details of her scheme for the aid, perhaps the release, of Rámbanda. Sometimes she faltered and would fain have abandoned the idea, but the necessity for making an effort for one who was like a brother to her came to mind to sustain her flagging courage. The wail of a jackal came upon the wind. It was like the cry of a lost soul, and made her palpitate like a frightened child.

She betook herself to her usual devotions, and, feeling calmed and hopeful, stretched herself upon the pretty carved couch with its inviting cushions of silk-cotton collected in the forest. The balmy scents of flowers that bordered on the house would have lulled her to sleep under circumstances other than the present, but to-night she was harassed with apprehension for Rámbanda, and fevered with impatience to put her plan into execution, so that several hours sped before she closed her eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

THE sky had hardly whitened in the east, and the bats were still in the air, when the girl leapt out of bed and ran to the window. Morning had brought more courage, and the apprehensions born of the gloom of night had passed away. To-day she was brave to do. But she would require an accomplice. She opened the narrow casement filled with small panes of glass in the Dutch style, and looked round the broad lands of the head of her family, the heir to which was most likely to be branded as a felon. Her silk robe, parted at the neck, revealed the graceful swell of her delicately-shaped bust, and the slender gold chain, from which the golden cross, hidden in her bosom, was suspended; some locks of her dark hair had fallen upon her shoulders; her eyes, in which the tears had started, were raised to heaven, where the moon was still asserting her splendour, and the dewy lips moved in silent prayer. The picture might have been one of a martyr rising to hail the morn of her last day. And the girl felt the danger and difficulty of her coming ordeal in somewhat the same sense.

She was first awake, but shortly the cattle emerged, driven out to the pastures high up on the mountains by some small herd boys. She dressed herself hurriedly, descended quietly, and strolled in a careless way up and down the front of the

house. An old man, who was almost past work, was diligently commencing his long day's task—that of thatching one of the outhouses with grass. She approached, and recognised in him an old retainer, who often in her infancy had carried her, when tired of sport, up the steep hills, or fetched her blossoms that happened to be out of her childish reach, or young birds from the nests in the thorn brake. He smiled upon her as of yore, and she, looking upon the *rencontre* as a good omen, said,—

'Bastian, I am glad to see you once again; and are you well?'

'In seeing you, young lady, all the pains that an old man feels have passed away; your presence at Mahaganga is like the sunshine. Would there were not the one cloud that makes all dark for us at this moment!'

'Never despair, Bastian; perhaps God will take that away. Would you help Rámbanda if you could?'

'That I would with my life!' and the faithful creature passed the back of his withered hand across his eyes.

'It may be that you can. I have thought of means to do so. I cannot tell you all, and they must be kept secret from everyone. It is no unlawful way, nor one to bring dishonour in itself upon the family, but it may seem strange to you. Will you come with me to Matila to-night after the house is quiet? It will lead you to no harm, and I myself seek only the release of Rámbanda. If I am successful all will again be happy. Even if I fail you shall not be unrewarded.'

The old man was dumb with surprise at the idea

of a young maiden of this ancient house breaking through the restraints imposed upon all her sex high and low. And for what? And yet he knew her so well that the purpose, he was sure, could only be an honourable one. But a secret errand! To be concealed from all the household, and at night! No! He shook his head slowly in silence, and looked upon the ground.

She clasped her hands in front of her in a despairing way, and exclaimed,—

'Do, Bastian, for the love you bore me in my childhood, and for the sake of old days! Come down and I will show you something.'

He slowly descended the ladder upon which he had been working, and approached near enough to see the contents of a small bag which she displayed.

'Here,' she said, 'is a note for fifty rupees. I have saved that for the poor out of the presents of my kind relations this year. Rámbanda is now one of the poorest, and God directs its use for him. And here are rings and a silver girdle. These are all yours, and will purchase for you a field of your own. Take them all now if you will but consent to me.'

The reward was a tempting one. His was a slowly-wasting life now approaching the horizon, and he toiled hard for his bare food. But from her he could not take the treasures. Even if he would, his sense of fidelity to the Ratemahatmya came uppermost, and caused him to recoil from abetting the clandestine errand of his niece. He waved his hand as if to set aside the bribe.

'I cannot, missy. It is a crime for anyone, and for me, who has been forty years eating the rice of this house, worse!'

She had failed, then; and, dropping the bag and its contents upon the ground, she put her hands over her face and burst into tears.

The peasant's resolution broke down; the childish grief pierced his ancient but tender heart to the core. He stooped and touched her feet with his hands in reverence, and exclaimed,—

'Shed no more tears, lovely daughter of Mahaganga. I will attend you, and care for you with my blood's last drop. Tell me but one thing. It is to no evil you are going, and for no purpose in which a faithful servant of this house should take no part?'

Bending with difficulty he collected the fallen trinkets, and, restoring them to the bag with the money, handed all to Kirimanica. She was overjoyed, and felt as if half the danger were passed. She said,—

'I did not think, oh, Bastian! that you, our old and faithful companion, would fail me now at this dreadful time. You shall never regret the part you are taking, and if I have to forego my own daily bread I promise you you shall never lack. May God bless you! And now, listen! At ten o'clock to-night be under the banyan tree at the first bend in the road after leaving the Waláwa. Bring a light, but let it not be bright, and cover it with a cloth until I come, that you may not be perceived. Be silent, now and always, of that which you are to do, and that no one may be on the alert; rouse not, if you can help it, even the wild birds. I trust you! Let no change of mind lead you to betray me.'

The old man was trembling with apprehension, fearing that he was furthering some unholy mis-

sion, and quite certain that the project of the girl would, if known, be approved by neither her parents nor the Ratemahatmya. In fact, had it been anticipated, she would have been placed under restraint. But he had promised, and now meekly and dejectedly acquiesced in her arrangements.

Kirimanica hardly knew how to speed the time from early morning to the hour appointed with Bastian. She felt guilty towards her own parents, and yet conscious that she meant no wrong, and was acting for the best. All spoke very little, and the house was dull, not to say melancholy. The verdict of the magistrate was awaited in the case of Rámbanda, and the terrible uncertainty that reigned drove all other thoughts away.

The girl worked and read, read and worked, under a painful feeling of constraint, her mind constantly dwelling upon the coming enterprise, and her eyes often turned to the valley far away, where some red-tiled roofs among the umbrageous trees marked the town of Matila.

The last meal was served at sunset, and for a brief time afterwards the family sat in the verandah discussing the probability of the prisoner receiving a light sentence, or even of his being acquitted. But, in truth, they felt that this view was too sanguine, and, in reality, their hearts were heavy with apprehension. The old chief had not appeared. He was suffering much, and was proud enough to suffer alone.

At an early hour they separated, perhaps only too glad to forget in sleep the care that cast its sombre hues over all their surroundings.

Kirimanica hastened upstairs. It was half-past

nine o'clock, so that there was no time to lose. She knelt upon the floor and turned out the contents of her box. She selected for her attire a thin muslin, close-fitting jacket, trimmed elaborately with fine silk lace, and a salmon-coloured figured silk wrapper, to be worn from the waist downwards, one end being brought over the left shoulder and across the bosom to the right side. Pearl and gold tassels were affixed to the ears; bracelets and ankle ornaments of beaten gold plaques in their appropriate places. Round the knot of her hair, worn lightly behind, was wound a wreath of champa and double jasmine flowers. The clothes were heavily scented by the sandalwood lining of her box, and her tresses fragrant with the odour of a sweet-smelling unguent. She bathed in water to which essence of rose had been added, and altogether took more pains, she thought, over her toilette than she had ever done before. She wanted to please, and counted upon this to win her case.

Regarding herself in the glass, she was not ill satisfied, but reflected that she must not look sad. The events of yesterday had imprinted the stamp of melancholy upon her face. A slight smile brought the delicate curves of her lips into play, and revealed the brilliancy of her pearly teeth. That would do, and it added the necessary finish to a charming picture.

The next step was to get out of the house without being perceived. She snatched her lace handkerchief from the table and blew out the candles that flanked the looking-glass, advanced to the door, opened it, and listened. There was no sound of life. But apprehension of being discovered, and

also of the issue of her adventure, made her tremble all over, and she was startled when the watchman beat the hour of ten upon the gong behind the house. Her bare feet enabled her to descend the stairs unheard, and, feeling her way along the passage, she placed her hand upon the heavy bolt of the front door. It was immovable. She pulled at it with all her force again and again, but failed to make it stir. This was an unlooked-for check, and the chill of disappointment made her shudder. She glided into the dining-room, whose windows looked upon the verandah, and quietly bringing a chair close to one of them, she withdrew the bolt which secured it half-way up, and to her gratification found she could raise it sufficiently to admit of her passing through. It was bright moonlight outside, and although time was flying, she was obliged to be cautious, and sheltered herself behind some tall croton bushes while she looked round. No one was moving. At the far end of the verandah were several recumbent figures wrapped from head to foot like mummies, in cotton sheets, and near them a dim light was burning. She ventured forth swiftly with an inaudible tread, and with trembling limbs and palpitating heart glided in the shade to the spot where Bastian was to await her. The faithful creature had been there for an hour, and was squatting on the ground, with his chin on his knees and his arms clasped round his legs, dreaming of a land where there would be no more hedging and ditching to be done. Kirimanica tapped him on the shoulder, which was sufficient to bring him to his feet. No word was spoken. But when Bastian had lighted the lantern he was aghast at perceiving that the

girl was dressed in her best things, and glittering with jewellery, and had forgotten in her haste to bring a shawl or cloak to cover her person while on the road. He felt quite angry, knowing that they would have to traverse the highway. He whispered to her to wait for a few moments beneath the tree, and hastening away, returned shortly with a clean white wrapper, which he signed to her to put on, and which effectually covered her figure from top to toe.

Bastian led the way with the lantern, and a long staff for the benefit of any enemies, human or animal, that they might meet with. They both kept an eye upon the ground for snakes and scorpions—the warm, genial weather tempting both to come abroad. The old man dislodged several, or brought down his staff with irresistible effect upon the unwary reptiles.

It was a glorious night. The fireflies were out, twinkling among their favourite trees like opalescent lamps; and, on the ground, creeping insects endowed with the same power lighted up the borders of the path. The dew had commenced to settle upon the blades of grass, and glistened like a myriad of gems, and was upheld in the ample fronds of the plantain trees in great crystal drops. The faint breeze off the mountains brought the fragrance of dried grasses and wild jasmine, and slowly stirred the drooping palm leaves that overshadowed the travellers. The nearer they approached to Matila the more disquieted, even alarmed, became the timid and inexperienced little maiden. At the Waláwa she believed herself to be courageous enough to meet any hazard for a cause such as that she had espoused, but, regarded

at close quarters, the ordeal she was to undergo seemed to grow more and more formidable. She lost her firmness of step, and once or twice called to Bastian to halt, in order that she might rest upon a wayside stone. Some carts passed, and the drivers, in friendly style, asked them of their business. It was Bastian who replied. She was his daughter. They were journeying from a distant village to Matila to join her mother. Kirimanica was almost wholly concealed in the sheet, and the explanation did well enough.

As they entered Matila the hour of eleven was struck at the jail gates. The thoughts of the girl at once flew to the unfortunate Rámbanda confined within the high brick walls. Did he sleep? It was not likely. The keen sorrow in leaving his old home, in leaving his father's embrace, perhaps for the last time, perhaps grief in forsaking her herself, would prevent the repose which comes so easily to him of quiet mind.

The streets were almost empty, save that many of the inhabitants were sleeping out in front of their shops and dwelling-houses. Bastian did not know their destination. The girl directed him to the road that led to Mr Gray's house. When they arrived at the gate of the avenue the old man evinced some reluctance to proceed. He protested that it was wrong for a lady of their house to put herself in this position. He could not understand the sense in which she was acting, and the attractive costume and fragrant perfumes, which heightened her charms, seemed to him to suggest only one purpose.

Kirimanica, now determined to go through with her project, exclaimed,—

'Bastian, you have promised to go with me: there is no turning back. Now listen! Half-way up this road you are to remain concealed under the bamboos. I shall approach the house alone. Should I want aid, which I do not expect, I will call and you can come at once. Otherwise remain until I return. You hear? It is my command!'

'By the Lord Buddha, think once more, lady, what you are doing—of your mother, of the disgrace to all Mahaganga!'

She made no reply, but threw the wrapper to him disdainfully and stepped forward, erect and proud, into the moonlight. The whole success of her mission now depended, she was sensible, of her being early enough to find Gray before he had retired to rest. He had spoken of his habits, and how at night he would sit up alone and get through a good deal of his work. Would there be a guard in front of the house? That would be fatal! The idea made her withdraw into the shade and approach the house in such a way as to be unperceived. The dense foliage of the clumps of giant bamboos enabled her to effect her object. She worked her way quietly to within a few yards of the windows of the room where Gray usually sat. There was one light, shaded, and illuminating only the surface of the table upon which it rested. She was relieved to see no person upon the side of the house to which she advanced. A few more steps, and, clutching the gold cross which she wore, with one hand, as if to invoke divine protection, and supporting her trembling limbs with the other, she glided through an open window which reached to the floor, and stood in the centre

of the room, for the moment unperceived and unheard. A change of position caused her anklets to strike one against the other.

Gray had been poring over his official papers, and at the sound he threw himself back in the arm-chair, out of the zone of lamplight in which he had been reading. He passed his hand across his eyes to be sure that he saw aright. 'Here! Alone! and unattended, Kirimanica! Impossible!'

He was young enough to have ungoverned impulses as other men, which break all bounds like the irresistible tide of the ocean when some great tempest comes. It was such a moment. He rose from his chair and went forward to the girl. She stood, unable to speak, with her hands clasped and her eyes lowered.

To him it seemed her visit could have but one meaning. Was he to accept it? Ever since the evening of his accident he had had a tender liking for the child. Then she was lovely and sweet in her innocence. How was it to be without one word from her to guide him? He forgot, like most would, that his duty to her in her feebleness was to guard and guide the girl. He put his arm round her with such strength that she was unable to resist, and grasping her hands with that of his which was free, drew her to his knee as he sat down upon a settee in the moonlight. Her struggle to be released was of no avail. It appeared to him as only a pretence of unwillingness. Kirimanica herself was so frightened that she was for a few moments speechless. The light fell upon her sweet face, and her tempting beauty; the fragrance she exhaled gave a voluptuousness to her charms

to which her companion could not be insensible. He stooped and kissed her lips several times. To the girl the sensation was a mixed one. It was supremely pleasant, but there was a sting at heart. She had lost something, first in his embrace, more when she received his kisses. She had parted with her childish simplicity and with something of her innocence. The latter feeling predominated now, and, without knowing how or in what words she spoke, Kirimanica exclaimed,—

'I love you! but spare me in my weakness! It was not for this I came, believe me. You pain me in my heart! Release me, for Christ's sake, your Lord and my Lord!' The moonlight fell, as she moved, upon the golden cross lying upon her swelling bosom as if to guard her from profane hands.

He bent and snatched one long kiss, and yielded himself to the true spirit of the man which was struggling to regain possession of him.

The little drama was played in a few minutes.

She was then left sitting, a red spot on each cheek, and glowing warm with shame, upon the sofa, in the full light of the moon. He walked up and down the long room for a short time in silence. A revelation had come. He was conscious that he loved the girl, but he could not tell at that moment in what way. His pulses were beating too high for him to be able to analyse his sensations. She felt in fear of further misconstruction, and forced herself to speak. She stood up, as if in the presence of a superior, and revealed the beauty of her form outlined by the tasteful drapery disposed with the unrivalled art of the East.

'I had come to beg a favour of you, even upon

my knees—a poor, weak girl, alone and unpermitted, almost unprotected. I risk disgrace, the loss of all I love, and perhaps banishment from my own home, but on a duty which, by God's guidance, I took upon myself. You are the magistrate in Matila, and will deal with Rámbanda, the son of the Chief of Mahaganga, and my cousin. You said once you would be my friend.' . . .

The meaning of the visit came at once home to Gray, who stopped in his hasty walk and said gravely,—

'Sit down, Kirimanica; you have done that which might ruin both you and me. In your inexperience you have taken a course which might still further injure the person whom you wish to save.'

She fell upon her knees, and raising her clasped hands, exclaimed,—

'Let me but speak for a few minutes. Rámbanda has ever been good and honourable. Our land has been encroached upon, and, traversing the boundary by night, he met the offenders and discharged his gun in the moment of anger. In the name of the merciful God who deals not with us according to our sins, act kindly to him in your judgment, and remember that he was provoked. Think of the grey hairs of his father, whose heart is breaking! In pity upon us all be lenient.'

Gray was angry with himself for his weakness, and was more stern in his reply than he would otherwise have been. He said,—

'Kneel not, child, to me, who can do nothing for you. You should never have come here, and you must return quickly as you came. The case of Rámbanda will not be decided here. He is

committed to the sessions at Kandy, and to-morrow will be removed to the Kandy Jail.'

She looked up at him despairingly, the velvety eyes clouded over, the tears welled over, and, bending her head, wept piteously.

Gray felt strangely moved, but was inwardly angry with the situation in which he found himself. He placed his hand kindly upon her head and said,—

'Do not sorrow, my dear; the case will be carefully considered. All you say is known and in evidence. Be comforted in that faith in which you happily believe. There is no prejudice against Rámbanda, even by the wounded man. He still lives, and is improving. The Crown prosecutes. Now you must leave here. Fortunately you have not been seen, but, had anyone been about, the result would have been disastrous.'

She dried her eyes and rose. She did not know in what manner she was to say good-night. She had been startled into an admission of which she felt utterly ashamed. And yet he had kissed her as if he cared for her. The lips of no one had ever met hers before in such wise. Were those embraces to be forgotten, only to be a mere memory and an incident of this night? She thought that she had better merely hold out her hand in formal salutation.

Gray was so touched with the timid aspect of the little maiden, and the plaintiveness of the whole scene, that he drew her to him and kissed her, it must have been several times, and holding her hand, said,—

'Come quietly, and keep in the shade; I will lead you to your conveyance. Never come again

in this way, Kirimanica, remember. I love you too well. You will think of me. It may be in the future that we shall meet. We will think if we can ever be anything else to each other than what we are.'

The girl answered quite simply,—'I never forget you. I shall always be true. But I am Singhalese—of a coloured race—and you of the English, the lords of the world. I fear me, to meet thus is the first and last time. The prayers of a poor girl are ever for your happiness and success. Farewell.'

Without an atom of boldness or immodesty she had placed her hand upon his shoulder, and, lifting her face like a child, received and gave back his last kiss.

They had come to the spot where Bastian was waiting. He was much disturbed. Kirimanica had been away for half an hour. She said in a composed voice,—

'All is well, Bastian. Rámbanda is to be moved to Kandy to-morrow. They will be lenient with him. Is not that good news, and worth all the trouble of a night's journey like this to learn?'

It pleased the old man, who was still, however, very disquieted.

Gray himself disposed the white wrappers round Kirimanica, and telling the peasant to be careful with her, said to the girl,—

'I suppose you must walk for secrecy's sake, otherwise I should like to drive you home. I am sorry that you should have this toil and the object of your enterprise ungained. But, cheer up, things may not be so bad as they look, and may God bless you!'

What a change had come over the girl in a short hour! She was returning more composed in mind than when she entered Matila, and yet that had occurred which she would have imagined would have agitated her nature to its depths. But she felt calm and hopeful. He was not a man to be carried away in a transport at the sight of a pretty face. She did not believe that he would have taken to his arms any girl who might have presented herself at night. No, her instincts revealed to her that, towards herself, it was an earlier conceived love which was simply finding expression. Again he might, if he had liked, cast off all restraint with her—she trembled to think—she was in his power, but he had spared her; that was noble, and showed the quality of his love and the strength of his character. She felt proud that she had gained the affection of one who was fitted in every way to choose his own mate from the crowd of beauties—all blonde, from her point of view—who belonged to the society in which he moved. She would still, in a certain sense, be happy, if he never sought her again, which was not improbable. To-night it was she who had thrust herself upon him. The circumstances of their respective lives were so different, and the barriers hedging them so formidable to pass, that it was quite possible that they might not even meet to speak. But the humble little heart had received something wondrous grateful to-night, and could live upon that for long.

They arrived back at the Waláwa without untoward incident, and Kirimanica, entering as she had left, crept stealthily upstairs and put her clothes and jewels safely in her box. She found

that she had dropped her lace handkerchief. Her name was upon it, and she felt distressed lest it should be found and identified. She even went downstairs, and as far as the verandah, by aid of a match, but found it not, and, flinging herself upon her couch, fell into a deep sleep, in which the unwonted kisses seemed again to be pressed upon her lips.

CHAPTER XV

RUMOUR spreads in the East with marvellous rapidity, and it could not have been over an hour from the time when the event was discovered that the news came to the Mahaganga Waláwa that Rámbanda had escaped from custody. The crenulated ridge of the jail wall was built up of loose bricks, and the wonder was, in displacing a number of these, that the noise should not have alarmed the guard. But there were the fallen bricks, and also the marks of the prisoner's feet against the wall. A rope had been thrown over from outside. It must have occurred in the dark hours, just after the perambulation of the guard. The prisoner got a start, which enabled him to get clean away, and he was never retaken. It was not that he feared to meet his charge, but the prospect of being herded for the best part of his life with common criminals was too much for him, and he availed himself of the means offered him to escape, which, in his position as one of a wealthy family, were not long in being presented to him. Rámbanda was never seen at the Waláwa again. But had his father, the same night, worn out with grief and anxiety, not been plunged in deep sleep, before as yet the silver gleams of dawn had outlined the distant peaks, he might have taken a last farewell of the son who was so dear to him,

for the latter had, stripped to the waist and barefooted, as stealthy as a leopard, insinuated himself into the room, and was stooping fondly, but with the bitterness of death at his heart, over the loved form. He pressed his lips to the old man's brow and quickly left, for he was now a hunted animal. A few things were taken of his own property (one was a small picture of Kirimanica), and as he quitted the house for the jungles he cast one look at the girl's casement. Despairingly waving his hand he plunged into the shelter of the forest trees and bush, and by little trodden paths descended to the valley of the mighty river that winds in deep gorges among the mountains of Kandy and Matila. Gone beyond recall!

Welletenya heard of his son's escape with mixed feelings. Pride of race suggested that Rámbanda should have answered to the charge of grievous hurt or of manslaughter in court. Then again, the chief would himself be suspected of having given bribes to secure the connivance of the guards in the escape, whereas he was wholly innocent of even such an intention. That would, however, be the general impression, it was clear. Further, had the trial proceeded, it was quite possible the accused might have been heavily fined and released, and the joy of his house would be full on his return. That would, indeed, have been a happy solution of this terrible difficulty. But, of course, there was also the probability of a more severe sentence—imprisonment for a more or less long period.

But now the lad was an outlaw! Never would he take his place again upon his own lands! It was an awful burden for the old chief, and the

weight of his years seemed to him never to have felt so grievous.

Rámbanda could not now return, and it was plain that he must not hope to see him more. And yet he might surreptitiously, by night, come back to see the loved face and gaze upon the old house once again. And it was in this deferred hope that the devoted parent lived, and wearily, with failing steps, went the round of his farms and coppices.

His relatives felt that he would wish to be alone, and a few days after the flight of Rámbanda they left the Waláwa upon their return to Colombo.

Kirimanica, at her departure, sought out the old peasant, Bastian, and pressed upon him a bag of fifty rupees, saying,—

'Although my errand was unsuccessful—that was not the right word, quite,' she corrected herself—'I mean, was of no avail for Rámbanda—poor, beloved Rámbanda!—yet you were faithful, Bastian, and this is a little reward I should like you to have. Continue to keep my secret. No one should know I went to Mr Gray by night. I know no evil, but my father and mother would be distressed were they aware of my boldness. I did my best for my poor brother, and failed. You love him, Bastian? I know you do, and so do all those here who have seen him grow up from childhood, and looked to him as the future chief of Mahaganga. May God, who protected His weak child on the night you know of, guard you and bless you in your old age.'

She turned quickly away, leaving the old man silent and dejected, holding the cotton bag of rupees in his hand. He watched her out of sight, and with a thankful heart transferred the bag to

the hidden folds of his waistcloth. Murmuring his blessings for her, he resumed his work of thatching and roofing the cattle-sheds. In the evening, on turning out the bag, with his wife, in his own hut, they found the gold trinkets at the bottom. He explained that the presents were given by Kirimanica, in remembrance of his service in the time of her happy childhood. Upon arrival at Colombo, the Panabokki family resumed their quiet life in the little house in Colpetty.

Kirimanica again took up attendance at the school of Santa Maria for certain lessons. But she seemed, in mind, to have passed beyond her old associates. She felt as if she had taken the definite place in the world for which she was destined. Yet she did not know, could not be certain, that she would be called upon properly to fill it, and to exercise those new functions of which she had become intuitively conscious. A sort of admission had been made to her by another person that he cared for her, but what immense obstacles interposed between them, even if his impression were not a transient one, in regard to race, prejudice, family religion and social sphere! It was well nigh impossible for him to break through such barriers. She knew it.

Mrs Agnew had heard of the girl's return, and of the episode at the Waláwa. Indeed, the latter had been noticed in all the newspapers. So she invited Kirimanica to see her alone. Lotus Hall was now interwoven with the romance of the girl's life, and, in a manner, sacred to the memory of a certain person. To go there had always been pleasant. Now it was delightful. She would be likely to hear something of Mr Gray.

The lady of the house appeared so bright and happy that Kirimanica could not help showing her surprise at the change, which was the more marked by the warm manner in which Helen put an arm round her and pressed her lips to her brow.

Helen pitied the child in the circumstances in which she had recently been placed. She knew how matters had been between her and Rámbanda, and could not help discerning the sadness and thoughtfulness which the childish face had recently assumed. But the particular interest she felt in Kirimanica had been deepened by receipt of a letter that very day from up-country, which she little doubted had reference to the girl. As they sat down to tea, the latter said,—

'May I say something, lady—something that seems to spring from my heart?'

'Certainly, dear child; do not hesitate to be frank with me, who am now an old friend.'

'I am full of joy at seeing you look happy. You used to be sad. The clouds have perhaps passed, and there is sunshine once more?'

'Too true, you observant little thing. I cannot tell you what has happened, but what I most prized, and deemed I had lost, has now been found, and I trust always to possess it. Then again, my beloved father is here, which has made me doubly happy. He wishes to see you, the original of the portrait which he viewed in a London gallery. Will you mind?'

'Oh, no, lady; if it be your wish I would do much to meet it.'

'My father is a painter. He has, with his friends, been to Bond Street to see "One of Singhala's Brightest and Best." They consider

that I have been fairly successful, and I reply that I had a good subject. I daresay he will want to try his hand upon the same, so I hope you will humour him. He and my husband are the only two dear ones that I have in the world. A sensible distance separates me in feeling from others whose friendship is often only of a month or a year. You will learn, dear child, as you grow older, that little which is professed is true and lasting. I must not make you cynical, but I mean that you should cling to your father and mother, and to them who are faithful to you in your childhood.'

Kirimanica said,—

'I see that you hardly know the Singhalese. We girls live, from infancy, timidly, in the seclusion of our own homes, the ceaseless care of our mothers, and the solicitous charges of our fathers, trusting mostly in their love, and apprehensive of all sorts of imaginary dangers that we grow to believe haunt us out-of-doors. Many girls pass straight from their quiet and uneventful homes to married lives, with men who have been selected as suitable by their parents. We do not form many friendships, and have more regard for our parents than most girls of Western races. My own father and mother have my first thoughts, and, although I am growing to think differently from them in religious faith, the longing grows within me at the same time that they should share with me the hope and peace I have found. And you, lady, are remembered in my prayers.'

The simplicity of her utterance touched Helen, who said, more unreservedly than usual,—

'Since you once spoke on this subject in this

room, my child, the shadow of a great disaster came over me, and, it seems to me, by supernatural means it was averted. The sense of an inspired word made itself felt in a heart which human effort had failed to touch, and a sudden gleam of divine light guided the straying footsteps of one who had erringly left the right path. I cannot be plain with you, for there are secrets which must be ever kept. This is one. But to me now the future has a deep significance, as it has to you, and I know that there can be no peace without reconciliation, and no calm courage wherewith to face the difficulties of this life, and the Valley of the Shadow of Death, except in that fact. Happy are you that no trouble has forced you to see the truth of what you believe! We have come to the same faith by different ways.'

The intuitive discernment of the girl gave her the key of Helen's veiled confession, and she smiled happily, with her eyes fixed upon those of her companion.

'In the past I seem,' continued the latter, 'to have lived in a purely materialistic environment. The pleasure and gratification of the moment, or the anticipation of some fresh enjoyment, was everything. Now, the incidents of daily life, which have no great purpose, seem to be like the little whisps of vapour that fleet by us on the wind, and melt away in a few moments, leaving no trace behind them. I have grown to feel that everything one does should have a purpose and a motive for ultimate good. I cannot drift on the stream longer, basking in the sunshine and culling the scented blossoms that grow upon its margin.'

She had seated herself upon the arm of the chair upon which Kirimanica was sitting, and put her arm round the girl. It might be that she felt that communion with this simple and artless mind had influenced her in determining to enter upon a new phase of life.

While in this attitude, Caselli came into the room, and, with a keen eye for contrast, stood at the threshold gazing interestedly upon the graceful grouping and natural beauty of the pair. It was a rare spectacle, and, for a few minutes, he was lost in admiration.

'That must be *my* picture for next year's exhibition!' he said; 'now, I will take no refusal. The light is perfect, but so brief that I must have several sittings. The short afterglow of the Tropics gives one scant time. It shall be called "Sympathy: an Anticipation." It will be a sermon on canvas.'

He advanced to shake hands, in his kindly manner, with Kirimanica, saying,—

'I have known you, young lady, for some time past, both from my daughter's letters and from your portrait; and now I am pleased, nay, delighted, to meet so sweet a representative of this lovely island. You will let me talk to you, I am sure, and you will teach me much.'

While they sat apart in the window, Helen approached her writing-table, upon which was a letter bearing the Matila postmark. It had been in her thoughts all day, and the reply should be sent this evening. The letter ran,—

'MATILA, *26th May.*

'DEAR MRS AGNEW,—I think that you are

almost the only lady friend I have in Ceylon to whom I could go in a great perplexity for advice. You are not easily startled, wholly without insular prejudice, and of sound judgment. You are also distinctly sympathetic. I am sure you could help me. I think I am in love, and my honour is committed. I was surprised, and my feelings *would* demonstrate themselves. If I could see you for an hour, and you will kindly name any day and time convenient to you, I would run down to Colombo for a very brief visit. If you can, pray let me have a reply by next mail. In pleasant anticipation of meeting you and your husband again,—I am, as always, truly and sincerely yours,

'CHARLES GRAY.'

Mr Agnew had permitted his wife to invite Gray to stay with them, and she wrote to that effect, naming an early date, and adding that she feared her counsel would have little weight, but that they would, if he wished, discuss the matter fully. She said, 'You are not the only person whose feelings have involuntarily displayed themselves in certain situations, but, you know, women understand the warmth of a man's nature, and make allowances for it.'

The girl and Caselli were becoming friends. His genial manner warmed her, and he interested her by his vivid and artistic descriptions of places which he had seen. Her own father, she thought, was stolid and somewhat indifferent to those elements which give colour to existence, and yet he was very dear to her. The fact was, her critical faculty was becoming strongly developed, and these ideas *would* come to her mind uncontrollably. Caselli

had already been among the Matila hills and the dagobas of Anuradhapura, and when he spoke of the wondrous beauties that had caught his artist's eye, and he had roused the girl's interest, he found that she possessed a susceptibility equal with his own, although naturally less cultivated.

Caselli had been delighted with his reception in Colombo. There had been no whisper of the differences which formerly existed between husband and wife. All was now sunshine at Lotus Hall, and the two seemed better to understand each other than they had ever done. The spiritual sense had become more refined, the materialistic basis upon which their union had been formed had been left behind. Caselli, too, found the life delightful. Everything unpleasant was put out of sight. The very servants performed their parts with unremitting precision, suppressing their own wants and concealing their own cares. All that was calculated to offend was hidden away. The very diseases that prevailed among the people were ignored or forgotten, and those affected pushed out to distant camps, where they would not be unpleasant to high society, nor find means to be importunate. Luxurious meals were served three times a day, carriages ready at any time wherein to comfortably roll along the well-kept roads in the grateful shade of palms and acacias, and the house was full of flowers, whose fragrance lulled the visitor into a voluptuous repose. Caselli said, laughingly, after a few days of perpetual enjoyment,—

'It seems to me, my dear child, that if I were to stay here long my right hand would become enervated and my brush be dropped. What of the *ennui* that such a life engenders?'

'I have often felt it, dear father, and I know it is mischievous. I could tell you much of its evil. But I have two objects of interest—one is, Kirimanica, whom I have thought I could educate somewhat in the best elements of Western life, and the other is a lady friend, Mrs Airlie, who wanted help. I have given it. She has formed healthy resolves since she has regarded me as a friend, and abided by them. Then, again, I have hopes now,' and here she coloured, 'which I never have had before—the most sacred a wife can have—and the issue of my future life seems bound up in their fulfilment.'

Caselli, with his quick comprehension, understood her meaning, and patted her on the head, then strolled up and down the room, enjoying the view of the lotus pond and the clumps of flowering grasses that lay up against the boundary wall.

'And what of this nice little damsel? What are your plans for her? What she is learning of you will unfit her for native life. You are not educating a race, but only an individual. What of her family—of her mother, for instance? It seems to me that ultimately, when your influence is withdrawn, she will but exemplify the sense of the poet when he wrote,—

> '"Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
> The dark, unfathomable caves of ocean bear;
> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its sweetness in the desert air."'

'That may apply to my little friend, but I do not think it will. She is more likely to meet with the esteem of some good man who will discern her

unusual qualities. I think I see her destiny marked out,' said Helen.

'Ah, marriage! A good thing for her *in time*, no doubt, but it is a pity that her education cannot be pushed forward before that takes place. She should go to England under your wing.'

'That has occurred to me, but there will be several people to be consulted—my husband, her parents—who will oppose the plan strenuously, and then—'

'The young man, you were going to say?'

'It came as a mental suggestion, a mere probability.'

'Well, we must try. We could make her very happy at Heath Lodge. The study of art, contact with English life, and the social intercourse we have, will develop her character in a manner which is impossible in her present seclusion.'

CHAPTER XVI

Charles Gray had been, ever since the night of Kirimanica's visit, perturbed in mind. The image of the Singhalese maid was constantly presenting itself in vivid colours, and not altogether in an unwelcome way. He had for a brief moment quite misconstrued her motives. However, he had quickly found that he had, naturally no doubt, made a terrible mistake. Her purity was above suspicion. He recalled that he had once told her he would be her friend. Trusting to that, she came. Her innocent simplicity and helplessness had made her the more charming. Her evident admiration for him she had not the art to conceal. He supposed that this, as it often does between opposite sexes, had awakened a similar feeling in him. Did he love her, or did he experience an obligation to make amends to her? He could not answer the question. Both considerations seemed to point him one way.

But, putting himself outside of his immediate environment, there was an aspect of the case which caused him much perplexity, and conflicted so with his own predilection as to make him at times quite irritable. What would his friends think and say? —his parents, before all? Some prejudices were unconquerable, and racial antipathy was often deeply grounded in the very nature of the individual. He could not help seeing the difficulties

he had here to contend with. There would be strong opposition on both sides. In the step which he contemplated, or was growing to contemplate, he might sacrifice the loved associations of his old home, and here, in Ceylon, be practically lost to his former acquaintances. Then the thought would occur to him—suppose that hereafter there were children! With what disabilities would they be brought into the world? To be looked at askance by the Kandyan family to which they would be related, and despised, perhaps, because coloured, by those of his own race, and credited falsely with all the frailties of the Oriental! He knew what an impassable barrier, created by pride and prejudice, existed in Ceylon between the alien and indigenous races—a barrier which almost prevented social intercourse in its best sense.

However, in his quiet and reflective moments, the thought of the solemn responsibility he had incurred prevailed, and, under the influence of that, he had written to Helen to ask for her advice.

When the reply came he obtained at once leave of absence for two days, and took an early train for Colombo.

The society of the Agnews and Caselli refreshed him. His monotonous life in Matila deprived him of the elasticity of temperament natural to his youth, and here he felt gay and hopeful. He was sensible of being with friends. After lunch, Mrs Agnew invited him to the fernery, which was luxuriant in the dampness of the south-west wind and frequent showers of June.

As they strolled along the verandah, she said,—

'Do you know, Mr Gray, I think I have guessed

the circumstances of your errand. Your letter hinted much. Perhaps I have drawn a wrong conclusion?'

He felt that he was taking one step more that would help to seal his destiny. He answered,—

'I may have expressed myself too freely, and I cannot explain altogether what I wrote, but I think you are one who would respect me for doing right above all other considerations.'

She smiled, and nodded.

'The simple child—she is hardly more—who lives yonder, and I have a deep interest in each other. We have met once since I was last here, and have met as lovers. The burden of concealment is with poor Kirimanica; I am sure it is a painful effort for her to keep a secret from her parents. And yet the whole thing has been developed from three accidents. Firstly, my being thrown in the Colpetty Road and being taken into their house; secondly, my casual meeting with the little maid here; and thirdly, a chance *rencontre* at Matila, when I felt that liking had become love, and was assured that I possessed hers.'

Helen regarded Gray doubtfully, and placing her hand upon his arm, met his eyes with hers, and said,—

'There was no harm to the child? I cannot think of you but as true and honourable.'

'Accept the word of a gentleman! She is innocent as ever, but if I have read her rightly her heart is fixed unalterably. And now, tell me, should I wait, or should the issue not be postponed? I have reviewed all the difficulties, the inherent prejudices, and the obstacles to be over-

come, but I have determined that my courage shall not fail.'

'You may count upon my friendship through all. You speak like a man, and I admire your truth and honesty. I think you will find that my husband and my father feel with me, although they may at first be startled by this revelation. I cannot give you an immediate answer. I, too, love the child, and she shall always have my protection. But she is so young as barely to have a definite idea of all that marriage means, and I doubt if her yet imperfect education warrants companionship with you, at this time, in the intimate relations of wedlock. You must let me think, and, if you are not opposed to it, let me consult the other two. May I?'

'You may put the case, but let it be treated as confidential. Your own wisdom is sufficient guide, but I see that you do not like the responsibility of a sole decision. It has been a relief to me to talk over the matter with you, and to make you privy to my feelings, apart from the pleasure one has in your charming presence.'

'That is no flattery from you, Mr Gray, and I reciprocate your kind feeling, but, do you know, I have had so many compliments paid to me since I have been in Colombo that now they are almost unheeded. I could wish that many poor girls, neglected because they are plain, could share some of them with me, but from before the time of my namesake of Troy, a pretty face seems to carry the day. I have been told, thousands of times, that I am pretty—a mere accidental and physical quality—the transient gift of a few years—but when I am also admirable in mind I shall be happy.'

'Well, if it be a pleasure to know the fact, I may tell you that you are both. It is fortunate that to-day we are restrained by law, or there might have been serious conflicts for the possession of one so desirable. I think, however, you are satisfied with your destiny; is it not so?'

'I have no regrets—not now. It was terrible to leave Heath Lodge and father behind. But I know that I am wedded to one who has borne with my weaknesses as no other would, and who has proved his devotion. I am, happily, contented.'

'I should ask for no more than you enjoy, judging as a mere spectator of the outward manifestations of your inner life, but I am aware that I am engaged upon an unusual problem.'

'May the issue be influenced by divine grace! Now, it is getting near tea-time. Knowing that you were to be here, I asked Manica to come over. She is ignorant of your arrival, but if you have resolved beyond recall, I think you should give her a word of encouragement. Otherwise, I shall feel that I am playing a wrong part.'

He took her soft, little hand, and, stooping, kissed it, and pressed it between his, and said,—

'I thank you from my heart. I have made up my mind, never fear. But listen, I did not ask for this clandestine interview.'

'That responsibility is mine. I must go now. She will be here at five o'clock. I will allow you fifteen minutes alone. After that expect me,' and waving her hand, laughingly looking back at Gray, she left the room.

Kirimanica's practice, when visiting Lotus Hall, was to make her way through the dividing hedge

as of yore, across the lawn, and into the morning-room by one of the large windows which opened to the ground. She thus met no strangers, nor hardly a servant. If Mrs Agnew were not present at the moment, the girl would take up a book and absorb herself in that. She was, to-day, nestling among the cushions of a large arm-chair, with her eyes cast upon the pages, when the door opened quietly. She looked up with a smile, and rose, as she thought, to greet Helen; but seeing instead her lover, she was so startled as to let drop the book and give a deep sigh, as her heart beat with great thumps. He approached to fold her in his arms, but her eyes were downcast, and her hands clasped in front of her as when they met on that night. He exclaimed,—

'Dear little sweetheart, is there no welcome?'

'I fear your presence,' she answered; 'we are alone. I know not in what guise you come. My one secret has been very painful, and seems to have divided me from my mother—my beloved mother. I cannot have more. Have mercy, and refrain, if you are only trifling.'

She half raised her clasped hands in an imploring manner, and looked so timid and forlorn that it only needed one glance of her beseeching eyes, which she raised to his, to make Charles Gray catch her in a tight embrace, to give the comfort which real love can. He seated himself in the arm-chair which she had occupied, and drew her on to his knee, saying,—

'I am here to tell you, darling, that I am true to you as any man can be, I have come to look for a little wife,' pressing his lips to hers. 'I wonder if you have thought in this sense of our love? Are

you serious as I am, or is it only a little maid's fancy that I have mistaken for love?'

She could not, for emotion, reply at once, but reclined her head upon his shoulder, and, in broken words, answered,—

'Until life ends my love is yours, dear, dear Charles! All else may change. I never will. But I see much trouble. If you cannot face it, and should repent, I release you. I will be as I was, but your memory will always be as bright as now.' He reassured her by patting and smoothing her cheek, and said,—

'That will never be. Be true, and we will win against all obstacles. Now, I want you, my little one, to confide in Mrs Agnew, who is a friend to us both. Be guided by her advice. I shall be gone to-morrow, but will return soon if she thinks I ought to see your parents. Ask her this evening if you or she should tell them. I have nothing to conceal, but to have you treated harshly would be painful.'

A footstep in the passage caused the lovers to change their positions, and Helen entered. She laughed at their embarrassment, and said, 'I see too much, I think. I am sorry that I was so punctual. You need not speak, I know that you are more than friends. Come, let us be unconstrained.'

She motioned Kirimanica to a chair next hers, and, putting her arm round her, continued,—

'So I am going to lose my child, am I? and to Mr Gray? May you both be happy!'

The girl did not reply in words, but slipped her hand into that of Helen, and averted her face, looking out of the window.

Gray felt pleased with himself that he had taken his long-premeditated leap, and, still more, that Mrs Agnew had accepted the situation so cordially. After tea he left the other two, as he knew they desired to discuss the situation.

It was arranged between Helen and her little friend that the former should see her mother and explain all, although it seemed to Kirimanica to be a mightily hazardous step, and she faltered much before she was brought to acquiesce in it. The disclosure probably would create a terrible rift in the hitherto undivided affection that had existed between mother and daughter, all the worse because wholly unexpected. She knew that were her lover one of her own class and race no great objection would be offered, but an Englishman in that position would be undreamt of. So long they sat that the sky had reddened and the dark shadows were spreading as the girl reluctantly sauntered back to her quiet home, with the music of *his* voice in her ears, and *his* kisses, as it were, still lingering upon her lips.

After dinner, in a corner of the verandah, Agnew and Caselli were let into the secret. The latter was pleased with the romantic aspect of the affair, and applauded the courage shown by Gray; but then the wisdom of the world was not that of the artist, who set no limit to the extravagance of human affections. He was only restrained by politeness from inquiring the details of the story, but in their absence his fervid imagination conjured up in vivid colours the little drama in four acts. However, it was not only the poetical suggestiveness of the situation that touched his fancy. He had the quick discernment that reads char-

acter at short notice, and he saw in these two the dispositions that would blend harmoniously.

After Helen had finished a short exposition of the matter, and concluded with asking their advice upon the next step that should be taken, Caselli rose and went to where Gray was strolling on the lawn, smoking a cigar, and patting him on the shoulder, said,—

'My dear boy, I congratulate you heartily upon the excellence of your choice. I am one without prejudices of caste and race. I think my own daughter, who is half Italian, half English, bears sufficiently good testimony that considerations of that sort are superfluous. I admit that your own case is an extreme one. If you had been a rake I should have said that you were only about to gather another pretty blossom, which would be thrown aside when enjoyed. But that is not so. You are upright, honourable, a Christian—so I believe, I am sure—and you will value that sweet, refined, little soul, whose love has been attracted to you, and who, although of the Orient, has the gentle breeding that commands admiration in our own country, and the matchless charms that you might elsewhere go far to find. With your manly forbearance you will know how to pardon her ignorance and inexperience, and to wound not that devoted heart. Be kind to her as you would to a timid fawn.'

They shook hands cordially. But Gray was not to get off so easily with Agnew, who, when the idea of this marriage was first mentioned, had emphatically said that it was preposterous, and not to be thought of seriously.

Their host called to Caselli to come into the

drawing-room, where the piano lights were turned on, and Helen's fingers gliding over the notes, and bade him stimulate the wife to sing the ballads that would recall the sweet days at Heath Lodge, and then Agnew himself took charge of Gray, and marched vigorously with him, arm-in-arm, up and down the verandah. He entered upon the subject at once by saying,—

'Gray, my dear fellow, you know what we are all thinking about now that you have given us your confidence. It will be respected, but will you let me speak to you candidly upon this subject?'

'Certainly,' was the answer. 'I have come down here to consult you, but not to be dissuaded: to take advice as to methods to be employed. But I am not reluctant to hear your entire opinion.'

'Well, now, let me say, that I think you are contemplating a step which, when irrevocably taken, you will regret. A pretty, innocent, and simple little native girl has fallen in love with you, the first Englishman with whom she has ever come into contact. You have reciprocated the feeling, attracted by her childlike devotion, and the perfection—I use the term as quite applicable —the perfection of her physical charms, which might well cause the pulses of many a man to beat high, I admit. Will your affection last, think you, when sensual gratification palls? and will not the slavish worship which she will lavish upon you come, in time, to bore you? Reflect well upon it. Then, again, you are going to form an alliance with an obscure Singhalese family, the members of whom know nothing of English

habits or of Western culture, the mother being wholly uneducated, in the sense in which we use the term, although, no doubt, an excellent housewife and an affectionate parent to the girl. You will, I anticipate, in approaching them upon this delicate matter, experience a repulse which will be mortifying. They have their own peculiar pride and prejudice, they desire no alliance for the girl with an English suitor, and will be profoundly suspicious of your intentions. We know you. They do not. And how about the reception your future wife will meet with from your own people, accustomed to the exclusive society of the county, and respecting its traditions as inviolable rules? And how will they view the children who may be born to you, coloured with Oriental hue? I am sure, you must feel, that they would be strongly opposed to the marriage which you contemplate. I have, perhaps, spoken too strongly, but, as a friend, you will pardon it. I urge you to reflect upon future possibilities. If you cannot at once withdraw with honour, absent yourself from Ceylon for a period, and give time for you and she to think, and, perhaps, to cool.'

Gray heard him quietly, and even thanked him for his considerate advice. He remarked,—

'Agnew, I feel quite well that your arguments are forcible, and would be equally applicable to any cross alliance. But I love the child, and that much has passed between us which has taught her that she is to be my wife; of how soon, or how late, we have not spoken. Everyone who has committed himself to an intended marriage has misgivings as to the wisdom of the step he has taken, I fancy. But the fact is, all have to admit

that imperfections must exist in matrimonial affairs as well as in all our other relations in life, and must be ignored if trifling, or repaired if serious. I am, I know, in the eyes of the world, making a terrible mistake in this business, but I am resolved to go through with it. I believe that I can be happy with this sweet little soul, who has the freshness of the early primrose, which not many, unfortunately, possess; and she, I think, has riveted her affection upon a future with me. I believe, also, that I have the moral strength to guide her and to develop her character in the direction in which we like to see it manifested in the West. In that aspect I am a little perplexed. She is too young and untutored to be at once snatched away from her quiet home and forced to the duties of a wife, in a completely new station, and, perhaps, to the responsibilities of a mother. Here, I think, Mrs Agnew can advise me. But, believe me, I am also grateful to you for your kindly meant intervention.'

Agnew laughed, and replied,—

'I see that your mind was made up before you came to Colombo. We must now try to assist you in your plans, which I had hoped, myself, might have been different. However, yet, I may be able to congratulate you, if you will wait and refrain from precipitancy. We are going to England shortly, when Casselli's brush has stamped the beauties of the island upon canvas. Kirimanica shall come too. The engagement shall, if you wish it, be declared. But I think that, for a year or two, you should remain at your post.'

'There is nothing,' Gray observed, 'which

I should better like than the arrangement you propose. No lady other than Mrs Agnew could exhibit more sympathy than she does with my little girl, nor could any other bring a better influence to bear upon her. One thing you will not mind my mentioning. She and I are of the Christian faith. Had it been otherwise, I should have suppressed the first symptoms of this rising feeling. With her the confession is a secret one, and conviction came, one would say, by a mere accident—a chance visit to St Lucia's Cathedral. Her parents are Buddhists, and she has felt uneasy about announcing to them her change of belief. That must be disclosed, but, at the moment, what I wished to say, with some hesitation, was, that I long for these early religious impressions to be accentuated and not to be obliterated. Your kind proposal has relieved my mind much, and I am deeply grateful to you, but—'

'Have no fear,' Agnew interposed, 'although I allow that most of us, in our society, carefully veil our most profound thoughts from each other, and are commonly content to be commonplace, and to be misunderstood, so that you, yourself, know little of our religious convictions—have no fear but that Kirimanica will have a good example before her in my wife. I would only say this to a respected friend like yourself. At one time, I think, we were hardly serious, except in compassing worldly success; but something happened which brought home to us the sublime lessons of the Great Teacher that we used to hear and to lisp when at our mothers' knees, and in those words we have found a unity of feeling which comes as a new experience. It seems to me that we are

learning the faith like this gentle little girl of yours, and that we shall help each other.'

Before they separated that night it was arranged that Mrs Agnew should see Mrs Panabokki privately and apprise her of the attachment between her daughter and Mr Gray. The latter departed for Matila by an early train.

CHAPTER XVII

Helen had heard from Kirimanica that the time most convenient for visitors at their cottage was in the afternoon. The early part of the day was given up to such domestic duties as mending clothes and linen, and the preparation of comestibles. The lady of the house would, at such times, be in old apparel, and with hair rather unkempt, and jewellery would be laid aside. But in recognised 'calling' hours, a fine linen bodice, adorned with delicate lace, and a bright coloured, flowered, silk nether garment, white stockings, and patent leather shoes would be assumed.

So it was about four o'clock in the afternoon that Helen drove round in a rickshaw, feeling rather hot and uncomfortable from the nature of her errand and the anticipated difficulty of expressing herself well in the peculiar circumstances of the case.

Upon sending her card in by Antone, who was trimming the trellis of lycopodium in the porch, she was admitted, and waited fully ten minutes for the lady she sought, who was occupied in putting on her choicest jewels, as a mark of respect for so distinguished a visitor.

Upon entering, Kirimanica's mother bowed awkwardly, but Mrs Agnew rose and offered her hand, which, however, was received shyly and coldly. The latter remarked,—

'I am hardly a stranger to you, Mrs Panabokki, since I have heard often of you from your daughter, whom I regard as a dear little friend. That I have not come before is due to doubt as to being welcome. I am glad to find you at home, and to make your acquaintance.'

'You are not unwelcome,' was the reply, 'but we see no English ladies, and, in the manner of our country, scarcely know how to receive them. But it pleases me to see one who has been kind to our beloved child, and one whom she respects, and from whom she has gained good.'

Helen felt every minute more reluctant to touch upon the subject which had brought her to the house, but forced herself to introduce it. She said,—

'Kirimanica is of quite unusual a character, and does credit to those who have brought her up. She seems to have acquired attainments beyond those of many of our own girls of her age, and yet to have preserved her innocent simplicity, which is so engaging a feature in her disposition. Do you never reflect, Mrs Panabokki, that all she has learnt, and is still learning, rather tends to aspirations beyond those of her fellows in this country?'

The mother sighed, and looked upon the ground, speaking slowly and painfully.

'Such it is, alas! we have been disappointed already that her parents' wishes are not law to her; and I seem to feel that she withholds her trust from her humble and ignorant mother in some ways. Something outside her home life appears to engage her thoughts, and I find it hard to recall the child of even a year ago!'

There were tears in her eyes, and Helen felt

remorse at having lent herself in any way to the concealment of the great secret.

'I am sorry for you,' she observed. 'I am sure that it must be painful; but do not lose hope. I think it is possible that you may help her in a way that you have not anticipated, and again engage her whole confidence. The girl, I believe, has learned to love in a new way.'

She paused, while the elder woman looked up bewildered and alarmed, clasping her hands spasmodically and ejaculating, breathlessly,—

'How? Tell me!'

Helen was playing nervously with her rings, and felt terribly ill at ease, but replied,—

'I have reason to think, indeed, to know, for I am privy to the circumstances, that a young Englishman—you have his acquaintance—has bestowed his love upon her, in strict honour, and that it is reciprocated. I need not conceal his name, for I have his authority to be here to-day. He is Mr Gray of Matila!'

The Singhalese woman had started to her feet, her whole countenance wearing an expression of profound anxiety and perplexity. Her dark eyes were gazing out to sea, away to the far horizon, as if to pierce the secrets of the dark future, her arms were straightened and rigid by her side, and the hands clenched. For a few moments she was speechless, and then, turning towards Helen, she exclaimed,—

'Holy Buddha! No harm has been done to the child?'

'Be at rest,' was the answer; 'he is a gentleman, and a Christian, and seeks to make her his wife.'

These words seemed to bring some relief to the painful tension the mother experienced, but yet

she sank into the chair, and resting her arms upon the table, laid her head upon them and burst into uncontrollable sobs. With her lively sympathy and keen sensibilities Helen was deeply touched, and, crossing the room, put her hand upon the elder woman's shoulder.

'Don't be grieved,' she said; 'the happiness of Manica is involved in this issue. They love each other well, and, if I can interpret feelings, will never yield each other up. Try to be calm, and accept what is now past recall.'

The mother, so absorbed in her sorrow, hardly listened or gathered the meaning of Helen's speech. She murmured, still in the same attitude,—

'Our child is gone from us, robbed from our home; the sunshine of life gone for ever! Oh, lady! has it been through you that this temptation has been thrown in her way? Would that she had never strayed to your house!'

Helen, still endeavouring to soothe her with gentle touches, answered,—

'You mistake. Mr Gray, until yesterday, had only met your daughter once in my house, and that was in my presence. The attachment began in this very place, on that evening when he lay, sorely hurt, upon this sofa, and you tended him. The child admired him, and now adores him, and he reciprocates it. Be brave, and face what is now inevitable. These two souls will be united despite all obstacles. Help them if you can, and let there be no symptom of displeasure, which may make a spot upon the sweet girl's memory of her well-loved home.'

'If it were I alone,' said the mother, 'who should decide, I might yield, for the child of my womb is

the jewel of my eye, a pearl of all pearls, and the sun of my existence; but you know not my husband. He will never consent. I fear even to disclose this secret to him, lest his anger may be visited upon the child.' She sank suddenly upon her knees, and threw her arms round Helen's skirts, exclaiming, with streaming eyes, 'Have mercy upon me, her mother! You are good and clever, and powerful. Avert this disaster! Find some means by which this idle fancy, which bodes evil, may be quenched and forgotten! It may be that you have promise of that which, still unborn, may make you feel for one who has a child who is dearer than all the world. Leave me not without this promise!'

'It cannot be,' said Helen, half inclined to cry herself, and strangely moved at the reference to her own hopes. 'I feel a woman's sympathy for you, but I am pledged to help the lovers, and I came here to make their way smooth. Rise, I beg of you; I am unworthy to be thus stooped to. I must say farewell. But there is one more word to speak. It cannot be that you are ignorant of the change in Kirimanica's faith? That it is in Christ she trusts?'

'I knew it not wholly, but in part. All is good which the Lord Buddha and Christ teach. But we do not speak of Christ here, and Manica has made no confession. It cannot be that each faith leads different ways, and to be hereafter with those we have loved seems the brightest hope for us unhappy mortals. The infant soul, part of my own being, that took wings some years ago to another world, leads my thoughts above earthly things. In all mercy I hope to clasp my babe again to my bosom in the next life. It is a grief that a child

should depart from the faith of her fathers, but the teaching of the schools brings many changes. Still she is good, and still I see her grow better. But to lose her love, for her to get to despise her old home, to cease remembrance of her father and mother—these thoughts bring me near to the grave. Think well before you encourage her to take a step which will bring eternal sorrow upon this humble house.'

'I mentioned this only,' continued Helen, 'because both he and she are one in the Christian faith, and that communion of feeling will make them inseparable in heart, although, carnally, they may never be wedded. I think, when you are calmer, you will see that it is best to persuade yourself and your husband to accept this proposed marriage, in regard to which I am really an envoy. Dismiss prejudice from your minds and think what is best for her. Good-bye! May I ask you to let me know what message I should send to Mr Gray?'

Mrs Panabokki detained her hand, saying, in an anxious whisper,—

'Is it a public matter? and who has been made aware of their attachment? Have they met privily?'

'It is known to me, to my husband, and to my father, but I cannot say whether anyone else shares the secret with us. I am sure that Mr Gray has not communicated it to another soul.'

The troubled mother smoothed her hair with her hand, and Helen left her standing in an attitude of dejection—almost of despair—again gazing out over the waves.

Kirimanica returned shortly afterwards from school, and ran up the steps with an elasticity in

her graceful form and a love-born happiness in her eyes, which had come to her in a noticeable way since her interview with her lover. All was clear, and truth had prevailed.

In a glance she saw that something was very wrong with her mother, and, throwing her arms round her neck, sought to discover her thoughts.

'Dear love,' said the latter, 'I am in trouble, but I will not talk now. I will tell you later. You do not forget mother?' stroking her hair, 'and nothing has come into your life to make you change?'

The girl looked down, and the red colour showed through the dark skin of her cheeks. She was bound to secrecy as yet, she thought; but the reflection seemed to create a great barrier between her and the loved parent.

'No, dearest mother; and yet—' she stammered, 'the clouds and sunshine come and go in the heart like they do in the sky. I have feelings which no one—no, I mean some one—not quite that either—which others share. Childhood is gone far away. I will tell you all—when there is time.'

She sat herself upon her mother's knee, and laid her head upon the other's bosom, striving to hide the burning tint of her cheeks—even of her brow. Had she but met her mother's eyes she would have seen that all was known.

'Mother, I rest! Be kind to your poor child if things are different from what they were. Should others fail, may this be my refuge!'

The elder woman patted her and kissed her passionately again and again upon the soft, wavy tresses, and then, feeling that any moment her husband might return from the Courts, she dismissed the girl to a friend's house for the evening.

Panabokki came in at his usual hour, weary with the tedium of an intricate land case, and with the oppressive atmosphere of a crowded court. He exchanged his black coat for a silk jacket, and sat down to a cigar and a cup of tea.

His wife felt herself trembling with apprehension as to how he might receive the terrible tale which she was to unfold to him. The more she hesitated to begin the more frightened she became, for she well knew how stern and unbending he could be when deeply-rooted prejudice was affected. She determined, at last, to describe what had passed during Mrs Agnew's visit, as most likely to soften that which, communicated abruptly, might be painful in its effect, and in its consequences too.

Upon hearing that the lady had been there, he expressed approval, and seemed to think the action a polite one; but when he came to hear of what had been disclosed about the mutual attachment of Kirimanica and Charles Gray, he was speechless from astonishment and indignation combined. He could place only one construction upon the motive which caused a handsome young Englishman, in a good position, to take notice of a pretty but obscure little Singhalese girl, and in this thought his anger was boundless. He had tutored himself to suppress his feelings, however, so he spoke not at the moment, but rose from his seat, walked to the door and looked out. It was after a long interval that he turned, the perspiration standing upon his brow, and said,—

'We have been wrongly guided in permitting the child to go over to that house. I see, too, that I was unwise to bring him here into your presence, and before her. The evil must be undone! Have

you questioned Manica? What has passed between them? Is it that the child has been harmed?'

The last query was in a hoarse whisper, and betrayed the agony of an awful suspicion. His wife answered,—

'Our daughter has lately been in my arms like an innocent bird, laying her head upon my breast. Be easy, she is corrupted with no taint of evil. But that she loves this gentleman who offers her marriage I see in her eyes. Oh, husband, it is a sad day! I should have kept her in her own home, and if in ignorance it is I who have brought this to pass, forgive me!'

She was surprised that he was so calm, having expected an outburst of temper, but his calmness was born of a determination to deal with what he foresaw to be a great difficulty. He said,—

'We must act, and act soon, to secure the child against harm and misery. I will think. I cannot bring myself to be harsh to her, but her future must be provided for, and this folly frustrated.'

He went away to his own room, and remained secluded there for some hours. When he returned his wife was sewing, and his daughter engaged with her books. The latter rose to welcome her father, but he received her caress more coldly than usual.

Having seated himself, he summoned her to stand before him, which somewhat alarmed her and made her quiver all over. He said,—

'Kirimanica, you have deceived your mother and myself in keeping us ignorant of the attachment between you and Mr Gray. It makes me sad to think that the trust we had in you has been misplaced, and that the quality of your love is base.'

She started and exclaimed passionately,—'Oh, father! I have never sought to keep one secret from you and mother, but I could not tell you of what was in my breast when my lover first lay in this house, nor when he told me that he loved me could I tell his secret, for he gave me no leave. I was ashamed to say what I felt. It seems to me that you cannot know a girl's feelings. Now that he has asked me in marriage, the kind lady of Lotus Hall said that she would tell mother. You must not say that my love for you is untrue. It has never changed nor flagged. It has been a pain to me that I have had that in my heart which I might not tell to you and mother. If you judge me to have been wrong, forgive me, or even punish me, if you will.'

She spoke so pathetically, with the tears dropping from her lids, that her mother bid her sit upon her lap, and clasped her in her arms.

Panabokki was moved too, and strode up and down the room. But he was not to be shaken in his resolution. He continued,—'The marriage with Mr Gray can never take place. He must be forgotten. Be thankful that in this affair you have preserved your innocence. I have determined to send you for a time to the convent of Santa Lucia. Show your love and obedience to your parents by breaking off all communication with Mr Gray and deferring in all things to the Lady Superior.'

He had a secret hope that the girl's religious feelings might find satisfaction in her new life, and, perhaps, that she might experience consolation in being permanently united, later on, to the sisterhood.

CHAPTER XVIII

Helen Agnew was sitting at the piano next afternoon in a reverie, while her fingers carelessly strayed over the keys. The lotus leaves were waving in the wind, and her eyes were cast upon them, but were really looking far beyond into the region of futurity. Something was approaching which made her think seriously, while she was at the same time permeated by a profound joy. It was something in which she was to renew her being and to live again. That was the uppermost thought, and, at such a crisis, what woman is not absorbed in these ideas? Next she was rather sad, because the faithful Antone had disclosed to her what had passed in the Panabokki family circle, and of the banishment of Kirimanica that morning to the convent of Santa Lucia. Her little friend, she thought, was lost to her, and probably to Mr Charles Gray too. Had the Kandyan maid lived a hundred years ago, under the circumstances, she might have disappeared for good until the waters of the Mahavelli Ganga surrendered the dead. Perhaps there would be a way out of the difficulty yet, but if it were to be by an act of defiance to the wishes of her parents, Helen felt that she could not help the girl. She loved her own father too well.

In the midst of these reflections the door was opened, and Mrs Airlie was announced.

The sparkling brunette ran up to Helen, clasped both her hands, and kissed her upon the cheek, exclaiming,—

'I *am* glad to see you. I have never forgotten, you know, our conversation of some months ago. Since that, somehow, Jack and I seem to have entered upon a different sort of life. We never have tiffs, and the fondness we had, when we married, for each other has come into new being. He positively told someone that he really thought now that he had fallen in love with his wife. Naughty fellow! And sometimes he even goes to church with me!'

'My dear Mrs Airlie,' said Helen, 'you are as flippant as ever, but I am delighted to think it is only your way of expressing yourself. My advice to you was not that which I do not follow myself, and I am sure that you are happier for it. I think that we both now realise what marriage means. Is it not so?'

'Well, yes, perhaps, but I would rather not be pressed too much. Wait and I will answer you later. It means a great deal, that is all!'

'I guessed so. You have a secret which you want to keep. It is a precious one, no doubt, and one that is the more cherished that it is your very own.'

'I am embarrassed,' said the visitor; 'let us change the subject, please. Do you know, I have been quite anxious to ascertain whether you had heard the news, which I can hardly believe, that Mr Gray is going to marry a Singhalese girl! As you are a particular friend of his you must be aware whether this is true or not?'

So the affair had leaked out. Of course, it was through the servants.

Mrs Agnew was confused, and hesitated to reply.

'I cannot say,' she replied, 'that it is absolutely true; I am not in a position to say so. He does not tell me everything that concerns him, and I know that he cultivates social acquaintance with the natives of Ceylon which might be misconstrued. I think people might wait until the persons concerned make an announcement of this sort before anticipating it and making it a matter of gossip.'

'Well, it is a thing that is being talked about at the club and on the croquet ground. I daresay he will deny it if it is not true.'

Here Mrs Airlie raised her mirthful eyes to Helen's, and, seeing her perplexity, continued,—

'It *is* true, then; I need not question you further; but, believe me, I will not breathe a word about it since it will vex *you*. But the very idea of such a marriage gives me the horrors. Here is a man, who might have had almost any girl in the island, attempting to throw himself away, doubtless, upon a pretty little thing, but probably untutored and ignorant, allied with natives who retain all their primitive habits, and without two decent ideas to put together. Fancy, when his infatuation passes away, when he finds that he has not even a companion in his wife, who is skilled only in curries and chutnies, whose lithe and elegant figure, in a few years, assumes a grossness and portliness that would become an English matron of fifty-five, who anoints her raven hair with cocoa-nut oil, and chews betel nut! And the children, if there are any, dusky as sparrows! How will he look with that fondness and

pride upon them that we are accustomed to witness in our homes?'

Mrs Agnew, although vexed, could not help smiling at the skill displayed by Mrs Airlie in delineating a not unusual eventuality; but she warmed in defence of her little friend, and replied,—

'The girl of Mr Gray's choice, you may depend upon it, Mrs Airlie, will be one of beauty of mind, of profound soul, as well as of elegance of face and figure, and she certainly will not be without education that, I admit, is not common. She will also be a lady, even if she be a Singhalese. Although such a marriage may be foreign to our tastes and prejudices, and may be cavilled at by most in our social set, it will not be Mr Gray who will repent it, I feel sure. And now, let me ask you, who have a good heart, suppose it should come to pass that such a marriage were contemplated, as a friend of mine, for I should be personally interested in it, try to give it your countenance, to give them both your sympathy, and to excuse it, when you hear it discussed and perhaps abused. Be kind! How happy would the world be if no unkind thing were done or said!'

'Oh, Helen,' exclaimed Mrs Airlie, 'there is no withstanding the influence of your sweet nature! I often think, in some ways, you are like a golden-haired angel dropped from heaven. One of my man friends said one day that all women were of a later and more spiritual creation than his own sex, and that it was only the brutal passions of man that dragged us down to their level. But I do not think that we are all angels. Some are, and you seem to live on a plane where everything is good and nothing mean. One feels, after being with

you, as if the fragrant and cool sea breeze had tempered the heat of our evil promptings.'

'I cannot claim to take all you say for myself,' said Helen, 'but listen. One evening we were in great trouble. It seemed that our way in life was to be for ever in the dark valley of disappointed hopes, and that no bright gleam of the coming dawn was ever to shine through the leafy shades that made it difficult even to see our path. But that evening we lighted upon a few words in this blessed book,' taking it in her hand from the table, 'when the dayspring from on high opened to us the eternal summer which will never end. You may say that this is imaginative, even hysterical, but I tell you that no worldly trouble now disturbs the calm peace which reigns in our hearts, and if I thought I could teach it to you, which I cannot, I should think I had done an act with which no worldly success can compare. Our faith has taught us to be kind. That is what I would say to you, and pray you to be also to the poor girl, to him, to others, if you can, of the gentle races with whom we mingle, but of whom we know and think so little.'

'Dear Mrs Agnew, you always teach me something good when I come here. Excuse me for saying so, but I think you have changed since you first came to Colombo. Like the rest of us, I think you must have started with many prejudices. I will try to overcome mine and be generous, and in the case of this particular young lady I will, for your sake, make the first advance, and try to conciliate her.'

'I believe that I have changed. I know that I have. I used to float carelessly upon the stream

of life, plucking the gay blossoms that came within my reach, little heeding the sorrows and the labours of the multitude whose work contributed to my happiness. I am sure that I have now learned to feel for them. That is what Christ teaches. I know, too, that everything we do should have a serious purpose. That also comes from Christ's precepts. But do not think that my faith makes me stern and gloomy, and intolerant of the weaknesses of others. No, everything is the brighter for it. The song of the birds is sweeter, the colours of the flowers more vivid, the changeful hues of the sky more significant, and the love for those who are dear, more pure and true. But I do not mean to preach to you. I only hope you may think, when you have time, of what I say. I am glad if you are well disposed towards the sweet child whose early love, and, I am sure, her only one, for any man, is likely to be embittered.'

Mrs Airlie had become so interested that she proposed to accompany Mrs Agnew to see Kirimanica.

'Is she in Colombo now?' she asked; 'if so, we might go together and call upon the family.'

'To satisfy your curiosity,' replied Helen, 'I may be able to show you the girl; but I should not be welcome at present at her father's house. She is elsewhere. I will order the carriage and we will try if we can get admittance to her.'

In her youth, and in the utter inexperience she possessed of worldly affairs, and of their tortuous and often tempestuous character, Kirimanica had taken her banishment much to heart, and the thought of an endless separation from her lover

sent a cold thrill through her, such as those have felt who have laid their last hopes in the mortal grave, and cast their last offerings of flowers upon the turf. She could not be mistaken in her father's resolve. Had it been her mother only with whom she had to deal, she instinctively felt that in the end her longings for her lover, the ruling desire to be for ever in his arms, would have been gratified. But Panabokki was so strong in character, so prejudiced, and, withal, had been so calm and determined in giving his decision, that, unless a miracle occurred, she knew that he would never yield.

It had rained this evening, and the mist rising from the heated ground caused a flood of golden light at sunset to be shed around. She was sitting at her window in the convent tending the lilies which she had been permitted to bring with her from Colpetty, and sometimes handling the cross which lay upon her bosom—*his* gift—and one that seemed to have united them in a sense profounder than a mere carnal inclination. She could see the square in front of the imposing cathedral of Santa Lucia, and noticed a carriage, which had arrived and was drawn up at the well-secured portals of the convent. After a time one of the sisters came to her room to summon Kirimanica to see two visitors, who, being ladies, were admitted to the convent. She hastily put on a cambric and lace bodice, and the salmon-coloured silk robe that brought to mind a certain scene at Matila, and descended to find Mrs Agnew and Mrs Airlie in the reception-room. The sister remained present, and remarked, 'The young lady is enjoined not to receive visitors; the interview must be a short one,

as the Reverend Mother Superior has scruples about the entrance of even friends.'

Mrs Agnew put her arm tenderly round Kirimanica and kissed her on the forehead and said,—

'I am sorry for you, my dear, in your forced seclusion. Cheer up! There is a better time coming for you, I doubt not. This is my friend, Mrs Airlie, who knows Mr Gray, and is come to make your acquaintance.'

The girl shook hands rather shyly with the strange lady, who was scrutinising her so closely, for she was rather perplexed at the introduction of Mr Gray's name. Mrs Agnew felt that she must explain.

'Mrs Airlie,' she said, 'has heard in Colombo society that Mr Gray has proposed marriage to a Singhalese girl. I suppose these things become known always in a mysterious fashion. Perhaps astrologers reveal them. So I have brought the lady to see the original. She will be kind, and, I hope, one day as good a friend as you have in me. So that if it should ever be, for which we must pray, that you should become his bride, you will not be a stranger among the English.'

She saw that the tears were ready to drop from the soft, dark eyes, and turned hastily to the window, directing notice to the picturesque streams of people converging to the cathedral for vespers, the heads of the women covered reverentially with lace mantillas or coloured cloth or silk.

'I quite envy you these romantic surroundings,' she continued. 'Father would delight in this opportunity. I must send him down with his sketching-book; and there, look, is a crowd of boys coming out of St Benedict's. A curious mixture

of East and West; one might be in Florence or Pisa, with a touch of Oriental colouring added.'

'Madam,' observed the sister, 'the young lady must withdraw. The pupils will be assembled for divine service immediately.'

Kirimanica said,—

'I feel your kindness much in coming here, and that of the other lady too. You will think of me, I know, and you will pray for me, will you not? My father wishes me to see no visitors, so this good-bye is perhaps the last.'

'Good-bye, Manica; I shall convey a message, which I have gathered from your eyes, to a certain person who will not, I am sure, forget you. Time will remove your difficulties. Adieu!'

Mrs Airlie patted the girl kindly on the shoulder, and took her hand, saying,—

'Good-bye! Let us be friends. I shall be glad to help you if I can.'

Just as the carriage rolled away, the servant, Antone, who had secretly come down from Colpetty, tendered a letter to Kirimanica, who was filing with the pupils of the convent towards the side entrance of the cathedral. She saw that it bore the Matila postmark. It cost her a terrible pang to refuse it, but here, on the threshold of God's temple, her sense of duty to her parents was uppermost, and she said simply, 'I cannot take it!' The old man turned away disappointed. She sank down upon her knees in the aisle, tortured with the thought that her lover would think her unfaithful, and the sombre notes of the bell, now tolling in the church tower, seemed the signal of complete severance for her from all earthly hopes. The home of her childhood, and the endless love

that she might have had in his embrace were gone.

'She seems a nice little puss,' said Mrs Airlie, as they drove towards Colpetty. 'I confess that I have been agreeably surprised in her. She seems to have more depth of character than one expects to find in a child of her age in Ceylon. Her beauty, and the grace of her figure, are undeniable. She will love her husband with the fidelity of a slave. Some men get weary of that. I think they like a little resistance sometimes. Anyhow, when it is not offered, a woman is often thrown aside as worth nothing more, after being fully enjoyed. I do not know whether to hope, or not to hope, for the consummation of a marriage which may be an unfortunate one.'

'I have formed a prognostic,' observed Helen, 'that this marriage will be more successful than might be anticipated from the circumstances under which it will take place. Everyone who marries feels regret at times, and the irrevocableness of a union, at first, is often appalling. I do not expect Mr Gray and Manica to be different from others in this sense, but the characters of both are noble and profound, and her education, if it have up to now proceeded slowly, will quickly develop in her new life. You will see that they will easily become reconciled to each other.'

Antone was so perplexed to know what to do about the letter, which had been rejected by Kiri-manica, that he came over to consult Mrs Agnew about it. She told him that it was undoubtedly addressed in the handwriting of Mr Gray, and that she would return it to Matila with a line of explanation, which she did. Gray felt much annoyed,

even humiliated, that the girl's idea of duty should rise superior to her devotion for him, but he positively began to respect her from that time in a way that he had not done before. She had, as it were, formerly, come to his arms upon a slight invitation, and had even thrown herself upon his mercy, prepared to suffer anything, but to-day, at the dictate of conscience, she was prepared to suppress her love and to give him up. There were few girls, even in his own society, who would have acted with equally high principle, and the incident caused him to admire her in a way to which he had been previously foreign.

For the present he saw that any attempt to communicate by letter or through his friend, Mrs Agnew, would be useless, and, at the same time, ungenerous, and he contented himself with the prospect of personally seeing Kirimanica, when he could next obtain leave, and of persuading her to run away with him.

But the conclusion of the matter was precipitated in an unexpected manner. The old man, Bastian, who had accompanied Kirimanica upon her nocturnal visit to Gray, had expended the money with which she had rewarded him upon a small plot of land, and to get the implements he required for developing his property, had been seeking to dispose of a ring which the girl had given to him with other jewellery. The fact became known to the police in Matila, and the suspicion that Bastian had become unlawfully possessed of this article was aroused and acted upon. He was arrested, and detained for examination by Gray himself. For some time Bastian declined to say how the ring was obtained, and inquiry was made

throughout the whole town in view of finding the owner. The girl's handkerchief, which had been dropped on the eventful night, was found in the possession of a villager. Some of the Ratemahatmya's estate servants happened to hear of these occurrences, and upon seeing the ring, easily recognised it as one worn by the chief's niece. Bastian was therefore charged with theft, and in the course of his trial was forced to admit that the girl had given it to him for a service rendered to her. All sorts of rumours spread about the place, and Welletenya, the Ratemahatmya, becoming uneasy, wrote upon the subject to Panabokki. One story said that the girl had been in the habit of meeting a lover by night, and that Bastian had assisted her, and had been the watchman. The chief recommended that the matter should be sifted, and slander, if possible, silenced. Added to this was the necessity for a legal reference to Kirimanica in the case against Bastian, and in regard to the lost handkerchief. She received the intelligence of it with a thrill of horror, knowing how her little indiscretion, committed solely in view to help Rámbanda, would be misconstrued by everybody. She admitted that she had given the ring to Bastian, and hoped that he would be released; also that she had accidentally dropped the handkerchief. She was not at the moment required to say more, and the old man was set at large. But for the whole of that day she was alternately turning hot and cold in prospect of the shame that would attach to her name, and which would be felt by her parents. At the cathedral services she prayed ever the more fervently that she might be supported and guided in this her

severest trial, and find that, the only real peace that exists, in the faith which had been revealed to her. She had often thought that could she but live in the love of Christ alone the earthly hopes which had been built up upon the basis of a carnal passion might be abandoned with little regret, and at this moment it seemed that the terrible disclosure at Matila would forcibly rend them from her. It was true that Gray was conscious of her purity, but if everything were known about her secret visit to him, and judged as the world judges, how could he stoop to marry one who would be sneered and pointed at as a girl who had voluntarily sought him out to throw her maiden charms at his feet?

The perspiration stood in beads upon her brow at the thought of the disgrace which awaited her, and the anguish which would be experienced by her father and mother. She pictured herself as lost to all friends, and perhaps, even in the convent, as separated, fallen and contaminated, from the other inmates. In the solitude of her room she recapitulated all the circumstances of that memorable night. Her motive at the time had been well weighed. It was to save Rámbanda, and it was a good one. She had acted in such single-mindedness that she had been able to implore the blessing of Heaven upon her mission. But she remembered that in Gray's presence she had been weak. She had lost herself for a few moments in the eddy of human passion. He might have taken full possession of her and she could hardly have resisted. That she could not forget, nor would he, and if she were urged to explain what took place, what would be thought

of her? She pleaded indisposition that day, and remained in her room, racked with painful apprehension as to what was coming next, and hardly strong enough in her faith to find the consolation in prayer which she thought to have experienced. It was the darkest day in her life.

The reddened sky was fast merging into the purple and grey of fading twilight, and the dim oil lamps that flank St Lucia's square were alit, when the door softly opened and admitted the girl's mother. The latter could hardly find her way into the dark room, but Kirimanica, hearing the well-known voice, arose from her couch and set light to the brass lamp that swung from the roof.

'I needed a light, my child,' said the wife of Panabokki, 'for I can read in your face more than you can tell me with your lips. Come here, my gentle dove!'

There was a prayer mat on the floor, under the lamp, which faced the crucifix upon the wall. The mother sat upon this and called her daughter to her knees. She took the girl's face between her two hands and gazed earnestly into the tear-stained eyes.

'Knowest thou what is said in Matila?' she asked. 'One day it is that thou hast had a lover to meet thee by night in the woods of Mahaganga. Next day that thou hast yielded thyself to the English gentleman to procure the escape of Rámbanda. I believe not all, for I see thy innocence still in thy baby face; but thou wilt tell thy fond mother the truth, wilt thou not?'

So, with her head lying upon the shoulder of the elder woman, Kirimanica whispered the story of

the night after Rámbanda's arrest. How that, being so sanguine of success, she had resolved to keep her intention secret at the time from her own mother, for fear that her audacious attempt might be stopped. She told all, even how she had lain in Gray's arms, and had been caressed. When she came to an end, she said,—

'Mother, I feel I should do quite the same for Rámbanda could I go back again to that night at the Waláwa. My obedience is due to you, but I did what I thought was right before God. I have done no wrong wherewith to blame myself. If the world cry shame, that is for me to bear. My love is given to him who has asked me to be his wife. I shall love no other. I shall carry his image in my heart for ever. Separated we may be in this life, but in another those spirits shall be in communion which could not be united here.'

'Child, dear and only child,' half sobbed her mother, 'thine ill-judged attempt at Mahaganga has plunged us into disgrace. We believe thee, but the world thinks few things pure. Thy father is much cast down. The Ratemahatmya has been angered by the spiteful gossip of the bazaar and the fair fame of our family being thus dragged to the dust. But thy lover has been honourable. A letter came this evening to Panabokki. In this he says that he has made public the fact that you came to see him to implore the release of Rámbanda. This he refused to listen to. That you came and went under escort. That you entered his house as a personal friend and a lady of gentle quality, having had his previous acquaintance in Colombo, and that you are now betrothed to him,

and will receive from his friends all the consideration due to his future wife.'

Here the girl stood up proudly, as if fully vindicated, went to the open window, looking upward to the noble dome of the cathedral, which was silvered by the rising moon, looking far beyond to the starry vault, resplendent with a myriad gems, and threw up her arms, as she leant out, in manifestation of her heartfelt praise to the Divine. She turned, with a new flush upon her cheek, exclaiming,—

'Mother, is he not a man after God's heart? If thy daughter is to leave thee, is it not to his arms thou wouldst trust her? He might have said our marriage cannot outlive this scandal. But no! he is too true, too noble!'

Her mother watched her with pride as she walked up and down the room, her lovely face glowing with intense feeling, and the graceful curves of her form displayed in all her movements. She stopped suddenly, and asked,—

'What says my father?'

'He is agreed that the marriage must be accepted. The affair at Matila has forced him to it. He was pleased with the letter, and respects Mr Gray for it. But he requires thy obedience. It is in this way. For three months he exacts thy residence in the convent. During that time thou and Mr Gray shall hold no communication. He leaves Mr Gray at liberty to withdraw, but also to renew his offer after that time. He has written so to Matila, and he begged the gentleman to see thy uncle, Welletenya, and explain matters to him.'

'And what sayest thou, mother? Hast thou no kind word?'

'My love, if Mr Gray is of the same mind then, I shall think thee well wed, but I cannot think that it will be as good for thee as a marriage with one of thy own race. I fear he will weary of thee. It may be that thou art only the plaything of the moment. But may the Lord Buddha avert such an evil!'

'Mother, the Lord Buddha never answers! Would that thou couldst learn to pray with me! Seest thou this cross? It was the gift of my husband, and it is a symbol of the faith which unites us spiritually. Our love can never die, for we are joined in Christ. Promise me then that thou wilt ask God to teach thee the truth.'

She clasped her hands upon her mother's arm, and sat earnestly looking into her eyes.

'See, mother,' she continued, 'though the night be dark, that is only so to our own vision; the brightness of eternal day is spread abroad by the Spirit of Christ. Thou hast no trust in the future from what the "Terunánse" teaches. Thou knowest nothing, nor whence thou art come, or art going. It may be that I or thou may be born again as a dog, and lose that repose which the few only can earn by self-suppression. Through Jesus Christ, God has told us all may come to Him, however sinful. Oh, that thou mightest be joined with me in this belief! If thou wast, thou wouldst not fear for my future. It is not as a toy Mr Gray seeks to have me. His meaning is more. I cannot tell thee how I know, for belief comes like some subtle odour borne upon the breeze.'

'I cannot answer thee, dear child, now. I must away home. Thy promise first to thy father!

I will ask God to bless thee through Jesus Christ, if it pleaseth thee. Kneel here that I may put my hands upon thy head. Forever may it be! I shall see thee sometimes. Good-bye!'

She kissed her a dozen times and left, and the girl sank down in a chair by the window in the happy state of dreamland that young love makes peculiarly his own.

CHAPTER XIX

YET it was not three months only but two years that the lovers waited for each other. Gray had the announcement made in Colombo of his engagement to the daughter of the Panabokkis, and the niece of Welletenya, R.M., immediately that he received a reply to his letter. The condition was that they should wait for three months, and then see. But Gray knew himself too well to defer publication until then of his betrothal; besides which, it was due to the girl's honour, in the face of strange rumours, to say something publicly. So for a full month the tea-parties of Colombo had a welcome topic to discuss. The general view was unfavourable to Gray's adventure. It was allowed that the girl was pretty and well-educated, but the native associations would be intolerable, and the black babies to follow!

But he was in no hurry to bring the matter to a conclusion, and easily fell in with the wisdom of Mrs Agnew's advice, that Kirimanica should go home with them to Heath Lodge before the marriage took place. And so it was, after much pressure was put upon the Panabokkis to consent to the girl's departure. They were afraid that she would die in the cold grey North, if not that she would learn to despise them, which would almost be worse. But in the end, weeping, they let her go.

A touching incident happened before Kirimanica

quitted her home. The papers all had a reference to the 'marriage that was arranged' and 'would shortly take place,' and of course the retainers upon the Mahaganga estates were all aware of the fact, and it was discussed in the Matila bazaar. The whole of the island might have known it if those dwelling in distant nooks and corners had an interest in it. So one evening, the girl being alone, putting up her best silks to go to England, Antone announced that a messenger, who would not give his name, desired to see her. He proved to be an old man, travel-stained and weary, with but a cloth about his waist, leaning upon a staff. He bore something wrapped in leaves and tied with jungle fibres. Unfastening the covering with tremulous hand, he produced a parcel in red silk, which he handed to Kirimanica, saying, laconically, 'For the wedding.' He turned, and marched, or rather hobbled, away, resisting all effort at inquiry.

She recognised the covering, and was smitten with a sudden sorrow as she slowly unrolled the silk. There lay the jewelled necklace that Rámbanda had offered her at Matila! And this was the final evidence of his complete surrender! Antone was so full of admiration for the gems and gold that he did not see the tears rolling down the cheeks of his young mistress. She begged him in a broken voice, if possible, to follow and bring back the messenger, that she might send but one word of greeting to him who was lost to them. Antone was just in time, for the old man had proceeded some way down the Colpetty Road. The former invented a pretext, saying that 'Something was wanting,' and that an explanation was required. The old man

was quite fiery at his honesty being doubted, and returned. Kirimanica pacified him by telling him that everything was safe, but that something truly was deficient—there was no letter nor inscription to show from whom came this regal gift. He replied that he was told to communicate nothing, but that he had the parcel from one who lived far away in the wilds of the Mahavelliganga, where its swift current roars over rapids and winds its way through tangled forest, and who was wringing a toilsome livelihood from the rocky soil, surrounded by a few of the wild people, the only denizens, besides the bear, and deer, and elephant, of those parts. The girl said,—

'Art going back?'

'It may be,' said the old man, furtively.

'Then say to him who sent thee, "My love to thee, brother, and peace be upon thee. I pray for thee;" and here, look, is money for thee to ride to Kandy and to find food sufficient for thy journey back.'

She pressed five rupees upon him, and he left. And that was the last news she heard of Rámbanda.

And one day a mighty steamer cast off moorings in Colombo harbour, leaving Gray, and the girl's father and mother, and the weeping Antone, to return to shore in a boat, while the Agnews, Caselli and Kirimanica were borne away over the heaving ocean to the cold, sombre North.

The girl flung her arms round Helen when they were alone, and the tears could not be held back, feeling for the heart that beat so truly, in the pain of that great desolation of parting from the native land, dear with all childhood's associations—a pain

which sometimes seems to be a counterpart of that which hovers round the idea of separation from earthly ties.

She used to confess to Helen sometimes that her spirit seemed chilled in a land where everything seemed painted in neutral tints, and to herself she often said that she was losing the somewhat passionate warmth of disposition common to Tropic lands. And then she was sorry that her lover might, when he came, find her grown reserved and undemonstrative like the people of the North. But she broke away from that thought, and applied herself earnestly to study art and manners, and to dwell upon the religious evidences she saw around her, for she knew that her education was beginning. In social usage she looked to Helen as her model, to the one woman for whom she had most admiration, and whose pure mind welcomed the closest scrutiny from her pupil. And later it was that the understudy became more attractive and interesting than ever, for something was expected which was to be a joy to Helen and Agnew which nothing in the world can surpass, and which, originating in the memorable night of their reconciliation, seemed to be the divine seal of it. Helen had come to think of it as tangible witness to the truth of her new faith, and there was a serene happiness in the contemplation of what was to come which she had never felt before. Then to have it happen in the refined and quiet home of her childhood seemed to double the pleasure. The wisdom of the young in these matters is more customary in the East than in the West, and Kirimanica, comprehending the situation, was able to be a companion

to Helen in her enforced retirement. To the former it was delightful to be constantly engaged upon little services for Helen, to sit with her under the cedars, or by the window, half hidden in the climbing roses, to read to her such books as they both loved, and to exchange confidences with her as to their own budding hopes.

This intercourse had led the child onward in her secret speculations another step. Up to now all thought had been centred upon union with the beloved; now she knew that there was something more, that brings to even the abandoned woman one pure joy, the offspring of unselfish love.

It was in the summer time, when the garden was blooming with geraniums and lobelia, and the sun was casting deep shades under the wide cedar tree, that another little life took shape at Heath Lodge, and, with her baby boy clasped in her arms, the last vestige of clouds which had once overcast the sky of Helen's existence seemed to disappear below the horizon, and she knew that the prayers that had gone up to heaven had been heard. The girl, her companion, shared in her joy, and began to realise in a way what was the sacredness of maternity. Another year sped by, the child was crawling upon the lawn, and lisping in his early speech; and another hope was budding and soon to bloom in the garden of the girl's soul, for her lover was expected.

She was half timorous that he might be disappointed in her. She would scan herself in the glass, and speculate as to whether her beauty had dimmed. No; the lustrous eyes, the ivory skin, the full, dewy lips were still there; the swell of the dainty bust perhaps more accentuated, and the

English dress gracefully worn. She thought he would think her still acceptable in form. But about her accomplishments she was more doubtful. She could sing ballads, and accompany herself with music, and with English arts and letters had much familiarity. She had gained an insight into the habits and thoughts of those she had met with in English society, and was self-possessed and unconstrained in intercourse with them. Caselli had, in his fatherly way, told her she was a charming child, but she reflected that he might have said so out of good-nature. She would rather know what Mr Agnew thought. He was reserved, and not easily won, but he smiled kindly upon her, and often escorted her about London, seeming pleased with her freshness and *naïveté.* Helen had delighted the girl by telling her that Mr Gray would have one of the dearest little wives in the world, and a companion after his own heart.

But still Kirimanica trembled as the time approached for his arrival, feeling that a great crisis was coming. Were he to display even the slightest shade of disappointment all must end between them ; that she had resolved. And so, buoyed up with hope one day, and diffident and desponding the next, the time arrived.

She consulted Helen as to the dress she should wear in order to receive her future husband. Helen at once, with her usual perception, saw the motive of her inquiry, and advised the girl to put on her pretty Singhalese robes. It was a golden evening, succeeding a cloudless day, when, in the stillness of the air, the scent of heliotrope and carnation seemed diffused in the atmosphere around ; the birds were twittering their last notes

among the cedars and limes outside, and distant chimes mingled peaceful music with the poem in colour that Nature at this season seems to put forth.

The girl sat in a chair by the window in the costume worn at Matila upon the night when mutual love took birth. The salmon-coloured silk robe and dainty white bodice were there, and the neck, arm and ankle ornaments; she was scented with the same perfumes, and, best of all, the golden cross lay upon her soft bosom, and was played with by her restless fingers.

He was expected at half-past eight, having travelled through from Marseilles. The Agnews and Caselli, with a nurse, and the child in a perambulator, had gone out considerately for a stroll upon the Heath, and would not return until half-past nine, when there was to be supper instead of dinner at an earlier hour.

She heard a carriage stop in the road outside as the darkening eve was clothing the garden with sombre hues, and the wooden gates thrown back at the bottom of the drive. She could not bring herself to look out of the window to anticipate their meeting, and he, being a stranger to Heath Lodge, was hesitating what to do. There was a ring. He had alighted from the carriage, and explored the approach to the house. She heard the well-known voice in conversation with the servant, and clasped her two hands over her palpitating heart, striving to be calm. She could hear the maid's words, 'A lady is expecting you, sir, in the drawing-room,' and a few seconds later the door was opened, then quickly closed, and in the fading twilight she saw his form inside. He did not for a moment, being

in unfamiliar surroundings, see where she was, and his eyes wandered over other objects in the room; but it was but for a short space, and he advanced quickly to the window corner as she rose with arms dropped to her side, as at Matila, and face slightly averted and eyelids drooped. He called her by her name in accents of passionate love, and placing both hands upon her shoulders, gazed upon the beautiful face and form to see what change there might have been in two long years. Her eyes slowly lifted and met his, both hungry for the love that had been so long restrained, and his arms clasped the slender figure, hers being round his neck, while their lips met in one long kiss that seemed to be the most rapturous of all—as if uniting soul to soul. She could but murmur 'Charlie,' and the almost painful feeling of her heart found relief—it were almost a new joy—in a flood of tears. There was to be no more parting, and there was one thing she knew from the look in his eyes—he was not disappointed in her. Might God be praised?

And when yet another summer tide had set in, and the garden at Heath Lodge was again in bloom, it was Helen's turn to sit by the couch of the child wife and soothe her fears, or encourage her hopes, and when a little heir to the Mahaganga estates came into the world, Kirimanica would often hold him up to be caressed by her husband, saying, laughingly, that after all, the babe was not so very dark. And then the father would reply that the child was like its mother, and that was enough for him.

In after times they would go to Ceylon for a season, for the Mahaganga Waláwa was, by the

death of the old chief, now theirs; and Kirimanica's dear, faithful mother would come to spend many days in fondling the little grandchild, and carrying it up and down in her arms in the shade of the suriyas and acacias. Even Panabokki unbent, and his stern reserve melted in the general sunshine of existence at the Waláwa, and with his wife would even listen to the words of the story of Christ as Manica would tell them, with the babe lying in her lap; and perhaps it was in time that they came to seem true, and to save.

THE END

Colston & Coy. Limited, Printers, Edinburgh